

# the weekly Standard

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## CHICAGO, THEN AND NOW

BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

# Contents

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2	The Scrapbook	<i>Duchumps for Duchamp, a new reason to visit Scotland &amp; more</i>
5	Casual	<i>Joseph Bottum brings grim tidings</i>
6	Editorial	<i>Rage and Misery</i>
9	Comment	
	<i>The Crusader goes to his reward</i>	<b>BY MATT LABASH</b>
	<i>The Angela Davis papers: why would anyone want them?</i>	<b>BY PHILIP TERZIAN</b>
	<i>Look who's stupid now</i>	<b>BY FRED BARNES</b>

## Articles



14	An Evangelical Saint	<i>Billy Graham, 1918-2018</i>	<b>BY BARTON SWAIM</b>
15	The Monster Next Door	<i>Serial killers and school shooters</i>	<b>BY ETHAN EPSTEIN</b>
18	How to Dig Up Dirt from the Russians	<i>The Clinton professionals versus the Trump amateurs</i>	<b>BY ERIC FELTEN</b>
20	Can California Lurch Leftward?	<i>The Resistance targets seven seats in the Central Valley and Los Angeles suburbs</i>	<b>BY TONY MECIA</b>
22	Will There Always Be an Italy?	<i>The question hanging over voters' heads</i>	<b>BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL</b>



## Features

25	Chicago, Then and Now	<i>It is the best of times, it is the worst of times</i>	<b>BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN</b>
32	The Mystery Martyr	<i>Who was Hezbollah's Samer Atoui, and why was he mourned around the world?</i>	<b>BY EMANUELE OTTOLENGHI</b>

## Books & Arts



38	The Man Who Lost the Movies	<i>William Fox was a motion-picture pioneer. Why is he all but unknown today?</i>	<b>BY CARL ROLLYSON</b>
41	Olympic Surprises	<i>Shaun White's comeback, Mikaela Shiffrin's nerves, and more from the Winter Games</i>	<b>BY TOM PERROTTA</b>
43	Turmoil and Travel	<i>Chateaubriand's memoirs wittily recall the figures and crises of his day</i>	<b>BY DANNY HEITMAN</b>
45	Novel Critic	<i>What J. M. Coetzee sees when he turns his eyes to others' work</i>	<b>BY MALCOLM FORBES</b>
47	Marvel Does Bond	<i>With Black Panther, an old Hollywood formula gets a dash of superhero</i>	<b>BY JOHN PODHORETZ</b>
48	Parody	<i>Jared loses his privileges</i>	

COVER: HAROLD BEACH / CHICAGO HISTORY MUSEUM / GETTY

# Readymade Duchumps

By acclamation the Art Institute of Chicago is already one of the great museums of the world, but earlier this month it laid hands on a work that its director called a “transformative acquisition.” The work is by the absurdist painter-provocateur-conman Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). The *New York Times* puts the price tag at \$12 million, maybe more. That’s a lot of transformation.

The museum’s deputy director could scarcely contain her excitement. The work, she said, is a “crux” in the history of modernism. “It’s a pivotal point, it’s a rupture . . . it’s an icon.” It’s a bottle rack is what it is, a homey appliance used by the French to dry bottles after cleaning. Not so long ago you could find one in any Parisian department store. Indeed, that’s where Duchamp, in 1914, found the objet d’art titled “Bottle Rack,” which is, as we’ve explained, a bottle rack. A \$12 million bottle rack.

Duchamp called such mass-manufactured household objects “readymades.” He plucked the readymades from their everyday uses, put his signature to them, and displayed them as works of art. His other readymades include a snow shovel, a chimney



*'Bottle Rack'*

ventilator, a dog comb, and—most sublime, most famous of all!—a urinal, which he titled “Fountain.” By presenting readymades as art, say art critics and historians, Duchamp subverted the very notion of “art,” thereby raising in the minds of deep thinkers the pointless question of

whether “art” even exists at all. It is a rabbit hole from which art critics—and artists, for that matter—have not escaped for decades.

You can never tell with Duchamp, who was (let us say) a very unusual man, but it seems likely his readymades contained a healthy dose of satire, a way of sending up the stuffed-shirt curators, critics, and gallery owners of his own day. One of Duchamp’s friends summed up the master’s thinking like this: “When [he] discovered the ready-mades [he] sought to discourage aesthetics. . . . [He] threw the bottle-rack and the urinal into their faces as a challenge and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty.”

There is a word for a person who falls for stunts like this: chump. In Chicago we could call them Duchumps. No arts administrator today wants to be thought of as a stuffed shirt, of course. If anything, since Duchamp’s time, the competition is to see who can most thoroughly lay waste to what remains of definable artistic standards. It cost them \$12 million, but the Duchumps at the Art Institute have won this race hands down. ♦

## Visit Scotland, It's Dementia-Friendly

THE SCRAPBOOK takes a fairly dim view of the field known as “economic development.” We’re not opposed to governments facilitating economic growth when they can, but there are very few things government can do, proactively, to spur economic activity—though we can think of many, many things government can refrain from doing to achieve that goal.

Among the most risible efforts in this field are attempts to “brand” states or other localities. Millions of dollars every year (so we would guess) are spent on these branding campaigns,

but the results can’t be reliably verified. We think, for example, of the television ads for American states as vacation spots: Minnesota might be a terrific place for a vacation, but has anyone ever taken the family there as a result of the “Only in Minnesota” TV ads? The phrase “Virginia is for lovers” is catchy, for sure, and the THE SCRAPBOOK can say with some authority that Virginia is a very nice place for lovers, but we wonder if the state’s famous tourism slogan—displayed on

countless road signs and T-shirts and bumper stickers since 1969—has ever persuaded a single lover to vacation in Virginia instead of, say, Maine or the Poconos?

The logic of government tourism branding has now been taken to a new level in Scotland. You wouldn’t think Scotland—the home of golf and single-malt whisky, the land of Highland clans and ancient castles and Edinburgh’s Royal Mile—needed much help in

the way of tourism advertising. But politicians and



bureaucrats can always find a reason to spend money that doesn't belong to them on dubious projects whose success can't be corroborated.

Just so, a Tory member of the Scottish Parliament recently proposed giving some tourist attractions "dementia-friendly" status. "A national register of attractions" could encourage "businesses to improve their facilities, positioning Scotland on the tourism map as a dementia-friendly destination," we learn from the *Glasgow Herald*.

Says MSP Rachael Hamilton: "Creating a list of accredited dementia-friendly tourist sites would be of benefit to everyone. It would make a day out or short holiday for those living with the condition far more accessible and enjoyable, and of course would be of benefit to their carers. And it would immediately open the market to 1.7 million people in the U.K., if you consider each visitor with dementia would likely have a carer accompanying too."

What sort of things would make a site "dementia-friendly," we wonder? "Dementia-friendly improvements to attractions could include quiet rooms for patients to take 'time out' during a visit, clearer signs for directions and advice, and changing the colour of doors to make them easier to locate."

The aim of going after dementia patients' money strikes us as pretty unseemly, but the scheme's supporters are straightforward about it. "The number of people whose lives are impacted by dementia make up a significant part of the tourism market," says Jim Pearson, director of policy and research at Alzheimer's Scotland. "It makes business sense to be able to see if you can offer a good and positive experience for those visitors. Baby boomers are the richest generation, and that's the group coming to the age where dementia is an increasing concern."

Oh, good grief. The idea that an assemblage of politicos in Edinburgh thinks the families and caregivers of dementia patients across Britain and the rest of Europe actually need their help in determining where to vacation is laughable—a sadly typical



instance of bureaucrats believing they make important contributions to economic growth by dreaming up preposterous publicity campaigns. But this is the sort of absurdity to which government-driven "economic development" inevitably tends.

If these official do-gooders will just do their jobs—fund basic government services and ensure public money doesn't get wasted or stolen—we wager that plenty of dementia patients will vacation in Scotland, and plenty of lovers will find their way to Virginia. ♦

## Reed College Update

A few months ago in these pages, our Ethan Epstein rhapsodized about his alma mater, Reed College ("My Old School," November 10).

He praised its rigorous academics and one particular course, the decades-old mandatory freshman humanities class that covers ancient Greece, Rome, and the Bible. Because nothing good lasts in this fallen world, Reed has now announced plans to gut that foundational course, dubbed Humanities 110 ("Hum 110" for short), in deference to the student agitators known as Reedies Against Racism. (It's racist, you see, to read Aristotle.)

Rather than provide a coherent, holistic course in the ancient Mediterranean, the school announced, Hum 110 will now be broken into "four



modules . . . each examining a separate city during a significant period of historical change." At least one "module" will cover a city in the Americas. As one friend of THE SCRAPBOOK, another Reed alum, noted acidly, "Ikea furniture is modular. Versailles is not."

Reed, then, is becoming more academically malleable, following in the tradition of other liberal arts colleges that have slowly gutted their core curricula. A strategic merger with Brown had not yet been announced as we went to press. ♦

## Full Emotional Availability'

For a few weeks now, Nashville mayor Megan Barry has been embroiled in quite the sex scandal. It seems Barry has been engaged in an affair with the police sergeant who was the head of her security detail. (Both are married.) For an added layer of unseemliness, Barry seems to have taken a lot of taxpayer-funded trips that included just her and her security chief.

The Barry scandal hadn't received much coverage outside of Tennessee. (If you surmise this means she's not a Republican, you surmise right.) That is, until the *New York Times* published a remarkable op-ed defending her, "Nashville's Mayor Has Stumbled. Who Will Cast the First Stone?"

Well, we're happy to aim a few pebbles towards the op-ed, which is a stunning work of rationalization. "The language of full emotional availability is [Barry's]



Megan—  
yet another  
Mayor Barry

native tongue. Perhaps that's why this city loves her. She hugs schoolchildren," *Times* contributor Margaret Renkl wrote. "She looks genuinely joyful at city parades and festivals." Oh, and did we mention her politics are really liberal? That's another reason we shouldn't get carried away.

THE SCRAPBOOK is trying to imagine how *Times* editors and readers would react if this were a sexual and political role reversal: "Well, sure Donald Trump's lawyer paid off a porn star in a way that may or may not have run afoul of election laws, but let's not get bogged down in details when the stock market is way up as a result of his leadership. He's making America great again!"

Finally, there is an unusually overdone appeal to our common humanity by the author, which begins to sound less like the usual *New York Times* fare and more like a *Cosmo* confessional: "Thirty-two years ago I, too, fell in love with a man I worked with. . . . I still remember the way the temperature in that tiny grad-school office changed when he walked in the door, the way the heat radiating from him charged every atom in my body with desire, the way I thought I would not survive another second if I couldn't touch his skin," she writes. "We all know this heat. It can reduce people to ashes. It can make us take incredibly stupid risks."

Indeed, there are risks one shouldn't take, and rushing to defend a philandering politician is certainly one of them. ♦

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# Grim Tidings

If you have lived almost any kind of active life, after age 50 someone you know dies every day.

Not necessarily someone you knew well. Not necessarily a spouse, a child, a parent—one of those whose death is like a part of yourself, crushed and torn away. But someone you knew, yes: an acquaintance, a familiar name and face, a hand shook and a meeting remembered.

You worked with one of them for a while, maybe; not friends, exactly, just officemates and colleagues, but still the kind of person whose funeral you know you should get dressed up for. Drive across town to attend. Another you knew from church, every Sunday for years. Yet another from neighborhood association meetings. Another from your children's softball league.

Even the butcher. You weren't best buddies or anything. Still, you got along in an easy kind of way, always smiling a greeting at each other, trading some quip down at the grocery store while you looked at the lamb chops. Then one day you realize that you haven't seen the man for a while, so you ask after him. What a haunting phrase English gives us: *to ask after*. And you learn that he's gone. Just gone. Slipped away the month before.

And then there are the older people you admired in your field: the white-hairs, the established figures you felt honored to meet as you were finding your way. They begin to fall away in flurries when you reach middle age. Every week or so, another obituary. Every month or so, another wake to dress for.

Mostly, however, it's just the ordinary procession: the hearses that besiege us, the funerals that blacken our days. The high-school newsletters

can start to seem like a series of cenotaphs, the alumni magazines a set of catafalques, the church bulletins an array of plaques.

You sat next to one of those lost acquaintances at a mutual friend's dinner party, out in the suburbs. You talked with another at a conference, then ran into him again, surprisingly, at the wedding of a colleague's



son. You'd read something another had written, seen her in the news, and been introduced twice—and were surprised that she'd remembered your name. You had a drink with yet another, whenever he was passing through town. And though you didn't spend enough time together to have what might honestly be called a friendship, you took to each other. *Took to each other*, another of those haunting English phrases. You shared a mild affinity: the fond acquaintanceship that is busy people's simulacrum of the deeper friendship for which they lack time or proximity.

Genuine grief would turn the world inside out, if it could. We speak of

ghosts as pale and insubstantial, but in grief—the real thing, the fierce inconsolable anguish at the death of a loved one—the dead seem more tangible than the living. The absent more material than the present. In the inverted world of sorrow, the missing person exists in sharp detail, and the ordinary world retreats: a dull, gray tabescence. When we mourn, the dead are not ghostly. The rest of reality is what comes to seem unreal.

That is not quite what we feel in the dying-away of acquaintances. Not quite the experience of the daily news of death. We do not mourn, in the full sense of that brutal word, at the death of those we did not know well. We are merely bereaved—bereft of a small portion of the world as we remember it. Saddened. Lessened. And the obituary pages are the measure of our lessening.

The answer, of course, is not to read the obituary pages. My father was a great believer in this solution. In these more recent days of email and push notices, Twitter and Facebook, avoiding news proves more difficult, but you can probably keep yourself out of the loop, if you try hard enough. Keep yourself in the dark.

Unfortunately, the fact of daily loss remains true even when we don't know it. In the highest of moral senses, this may be the most vile portion of the human condition—that to live is to have to see others die. But even in a lesser sense, it's an ugly thing. To age is to watch the world erode, the people we knew slipping away. Every day, another one.

To dwell on the thought . . . but then, we don't dwell on it, do we? We can't and still function. So we don't, which is undoubtedly the healthy and wise thing to do. But I heard some news last night about an old acquaintance. The old news, heard again and again, and I feel as though my skin has worn away.

JOSEPH BOTTUM

# Rage and Misery

On February 14, a deeply troubled young man named Nikolas Cruz walked into the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Cruz, 19, took an AR-15 rifle out of a black duffel bag and began firing at students in the hallways and in classrooms. In all, he murdered 17 people and injured 14 others. He was arrested later that day, having briefly escaped by blending in with fleeing students. He awaits trial in the main Broward County jail.

As in similar mass shootings in recent years, law enforcement was aware of the danger posed by Cruz. In this case, a caller to the tipline of the FBI's Miami field office had described Cruz's "gun ownership, desire to kill people, erratic behavior, and disturbing social media posts, as well as the potential of him conducting a school shooting." The bureau failed to take action.

The response of most Democrats and the mainstream news media, however, is not to ask how law enforcement officers failed so spectacularly to intercept an obvious threat, but, with flawless predictability, to fix their attention on the one question that admits of no political solution and offers no hope of stopping lunatic killers like Cruz: the laws governing gun ownership in the United States.

The focus of left-liberal animus is, as it always is after mass shootings, the National Rifle Association. Rarely if ever have we seen so much power and influence attributed to a single organization. If you knew nothing about American politics and read the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times* or watched MSNBC after the Parkland tragedy, you would conclude that the NRA—or a more nebulous entity called "the gun lobby"—holds Svengali-like powers over the nation's political leaders.

The NRA and other gun-rights groups devote about as much to lobbying as many other special-interest groups do. Members of Congress are free to ignore them, and many do. Most of those who cast their votes against new regulations on firearms do so for principled reasons, not financial or crassly political ones: Many oppose new gun laws because they don't believe these laws will accomplish their stated

ends. We tend to agree with them. Others may oppose new gun laws out of fear that the NRA will run ads against them or fund an opponent, but that is a routine part of electoral politics. It applies to the farm lobby and the environmental lobby and every other special interest group in Washington.

None of these groups has an unlimited ability to "bankroll" candidates. Whatever clout single-issue groups have is largely a reflection of the popular support for their side.

If members of Congress listen to the gun lobby, it is because large numbers of their constituents (a) feel strongly about the issue of gun control and (b) are not sympathetic to new regulation. Single-issue groups like the NRA do not create supporters; they either have them or they do not. The NRA has them.

Gun-control supporters like to point out that a majority of Americans tell pollsters

they favor stricter gun laws—a Quinnipiac poll conducted just after the Parkland shooting indicates that 66 percent of registered voters favor stricter gun laws. Such polls are driven as often by sentiment as by fixed opinion. Telling a pollster that, yes, you favor stricter gun laws is a way of saying you wish Parkland hadn't happened. When it comes to debating specific proposals, however, the people who care most deeply about the issue—the people who base their votes and their financial contributions on it—want to know exactly how proposed regulations will stop actual gun crimes.

And that's a question gun-control proponents have trouble answering. We are open to the possibility that gun laws need to be changed or updated from time to time. This magazine favors a ban on "bump stocks," the device that turns semiautomatic rifles into something close to machine guns. But the debate over gun ownership—if *debate* is the right word—generally only takes place after a psychopath carries out his satanic dream. Rejiggering gun laws is not a rational way to respond to the determined deeds of maniacs. Should the state of Florida or Congress raise the age at which you can buy certain kinds of rifles? The question is not an absurd one. What is absurd is the idea that this or similar laws would dissuade someone like Nikolas Cruz



A post-shooting rally at the Florida State Capitol on February 21

from carrying out the rampage on which he had set his twisted mind.

Surely, though, something can be done.

Let us grant the ineradicable existence of America's gun culture; millions of ordinary Americans own and enjoy guns, making comparisons to Scotland or Finland worse than useless. Let us grant, too, that many progressives' unstated aim—a full-on gun ban—is a political and practical impossibility. Few Democrats will even admit that they would prefer to get rid of the Second Amendment, and none will propose it any time soon.

Let us grant all that. But we should also admit that these newsmaking mass shootings are becoming more frequent and more disturbing. Ignoring the tendentious statistics on gun violence perpetrated by the *New York Times* and other left-liberal outlets—the *Times* includes everything from suicides to pellet-gun "shootings" in its "gun violence" tolls—every right-minded American senses that something is wrong. In October, Stephen Paddock killed 58 in Las Vegas. A month later, Devin Patrick Kelley killed 26 in a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas. Now 17 are dead in Parkland, Florida. That another bloodbath will happen soon seems certain.

But the increased frequency of these diabolical acts itself would seem to suggest that the availability of guns is not the reason. Americans have always had the freedom to own and use firearms; it's far harder to buy a gun now

than it was 40 or 50 years ago. Yet mass shootings weren't anything like a routine part of the news cycle in the way they have become. Why the change? Why has murdering strangers with a gun become an attraction for a certain kind of warped soul?

Surely part of the answer is the obsessive and emotive coverage given to these incidents. The dozens of stories by every major news outlet, the handwringing of editorialists and commentators, the interviews with the family members of victims and with gun activists, the press conferences by law enforcement, the virtue-signaling by politicians, the endless arguments between talking heads on news programs, the lavish and complex infographics splashed across the papers—the whole neurotic business goes on for days and days. After Parkland, we seem to have introduced a new element: impassioned teenagers who demand to be heeded, not because they've studied the problem and have ideas to contribute, but simply on the grounds that the victims were teenagers and so are they.

These episodes of rage and misery over a problem that has no near-term political solution seem almost calculated to encourage yet more sordid souls to come forward in gruesome bids for fame. The news media may at some point grow weary of giving these murderers what they crave. For now, we mourn the dead, noting only that further ire and recrimination won't bring them back, and it won't keep other innocents from a similar fate. ♦

## Can the Government Nationalize a Business?

THOMAS J. DONOHUE

PRESIDENT AND CEO  
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Is the federal government allowed to take over and run a private business in an emergency? That is the fundamental question at the heart of a case brought by Starr International Company against the federal government.

Starr is a major shareholder of insurer American International Group (AIG), which received emergency loans from the federal government during the financial crisis of 2008. However, as a condition of these loans, the government demanded that it receive an almost 80% ownership interest in AIG. The government took control of the company and eventually pocketed nearly \$23 billion in profits when it sold its 80% stake. Starr argues that federal law never allowed the government to take an ownership stake in return for its loans and is seeking to recover the illegal gain made by the

government's unlawful takeover.

In June 2015, the U.S. Court of Federal Claims agreed with Starr that the government overstepped its authority by taking 80% of the company. But a federal appeals court overturned the ruling on the theory that AIG shareholders did not have "standing" to seek a remedy for that violation in court. Starr has now petitioned the Supreme Court to take up the case, and the Court is scheduled to consider that request this week.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce supported the federal government in extending emergency credit in 2008 because, without swift government intervention, the global financial markets were in danger of shutting down. But this particular case raises separate and deeply important questions about how far the government can go when issuing emergency loans, including whether it can nationalize a business receiving such loans. These questions should be

dealt with now, once and for all.

In a free enterprise system such as ours, it is troubling when the government makes billions in profits by running a previously private business. And this is not the first time this issue has arisen. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were similarly taken over, and the government has continued to claim their profits ever since. That may come to an end soon, and the Chamber stands ready to work with the administration and Congress to resolve the issue.

The question remains: How do we reconcile the rights of businesses in our free enterprise economy with the interests of taxpayers in stabilizing businesses in a financial crisis? As Fannie and Freddie prove, this is not a one-time dilemma unique to AIG. Indeed, these critical questions may come before the Supreme Court if it chooses to review the *Starr International* case.



Learn more at  
[uschamber.com/abovethefold](http://uschamber.com/abovethefold)

MATT LABASH

# The Crusader Goes to His Reward

Just a few days before America's Pastor, Billy Graham, succumbed to Parkinson's or cancer or pneumonia (when you're 99-years-young, ailments tend to arrive in multiple-choice fashion), I was walking through Washington's new Museum of the Bible with my family. As local museums go, the Bible museum is not a sexy one, like, say, the National Museum of American History, which houses the artifacts our culture tends to prize more than the inspired word of God (Fonzie's jacket, Seinfeld's "puffy shirt," etc.).

And yet my wife was blown back by a simple Billy Graham exhibit, as she read from a wall panel that he had preached to more people in live audiences than anyone in history—about 215 million in 185 countries. Her awe didn't immediately register. Having skipped lunch, I was distracted and in search of the museum's Manna restaurant for some fast-casual rotisserie lamb. But I managed to mutter that it was amazing he's still with us. "He's not dead?" she asked. "He might as well be," I replied.

I meant no disrespect, nor was I being prophetic about what would come just two days later. I merely meant that his ilk—assuming Graham isn't such a singular figure that he has no ilk—is no longer with us. For the "Protestant Pope," as some called him, was that rarest of marquee preachers, one who, as the book of Micah puts it, did justly and loved mercy and walked humbly with his God.

Raised on a dairy farm, originally aspiring to play professional baseball, the rangy Tarheel with the matinee-idol looks got saved at a Charlotte tent revival in his teens, at the fire-and-

brimstone-stoking hand of the sawdust evangelist Mordecai Ham. He honed his craft first as a door-to-door Fuller Brush salesman, then as a reluctant guest-preacher who was so nervous his hands sweated and his knees knocked as he delivered all four of his canned sermons in eight minutes.

Practice made perfect. He spent his years at the Florida Bible Institute paddling a canoe out to a little



**Billy Graham never built waterslides for Jesus. He never sported hipster tattoo sleeves or slammed shots with Justin Bieber or oozed across the stage preaching the prosperity gospel.**

island in a Hillsborough River swamp where he preached to the alligators and birds. "If they would not stop to listen," Graham wrote, "there was always a congregation of cypress stumps that could neither slither nor fly away. The loudness of my preaching was in direct proportion to their unresponsiveness, so the trees got my voice at full blast."

While none of the cypress stumps came to Jesus, an estimated 3.2 million people answered Graham's altar call during the seven decades of his "crusades"—a name he eventually dropped so as not to repel his Islamic brothers. Unlike many TV-preachers-turned-pundits, Graham favored multiplication over division. In a 1992 crusade in Moscow, a full quarter of the 155,000 attendees came forward as he drew the net.

Graham became a veritable Zelig

of the American Century. A registered Democrat who in his early days was called "the Antichrist" by hard-driving fundies who thought his ecumenism was heresy, Graham counseled, prayed, or skinny-dipped in the White House pool (with Lyndon Johnson—who else?) with every president from Harry Truman to Barack Obama, mostly at their behest.

He brought the Good News to everyone from pampered American suburbanites to poverty-stricken African villagers. He integrated his crusades long before Jim Crow laws were overturned, posted bail for Martin Luther King Jr., and decried apartheid in South Africa a decade before it became a *cause célèbre*. He talked J.C. with everyone from the gangster Mickey Cohen to the self-described "C-plus Christian" Johnny Cash, an ardent friend of Graham's. Cash, who was forever warding off personal demons and addictions, even took to singing songs like Kris Kristofferson's "Why Me Lord?" at Graham's crusades. A song of humble gratitude, not lamentation, it summed up Graham's operating ethos: *Why me Lord? / What have I ever done / To deserve even one / Of the pleasures I've known.*

As Cash's son, John Carter, put it to the singer's biographer, Robert Hilburn: "When my father fell short, he could always reach out to Billy. Billy didn't judge my father; he was there as his friend unconditionally. Billy would lift him up, support him, and say, 'You can do this. Stand back up. You know who you are.'"

After a day or so of marinating in his obituaries, it occurred to me that the thing I appreciated most about Billy Graham was that he didn't require you to think about Billy Graham. Unlike so many self-aggrandizing televangelists, Moral Majority grifters, and preachers-cum-ward-heelers, he left no hookers or no-tell-motel church secretaries or

embezzled funds in his wake. Billy Graham never built waterslides for Jesus. He never sported hipster tattoo sleeves so he could slam shots with Justin Bieber or oozed his way across the stage preaching the prosperity gospel or became an unrepentant partisan peckerhead who'd rather add to Trump's flock than Christ's.

If you were a lukewarm Christian, lax in your duties, as I am (the Man in Black isn't the only C-plus Christian), you took solace in the fact that Billy Graham was hoeing his row, taking the Great Commission more seriously than perhaps any human being ever has. (Matthew 28:19: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations . . .") He was as reliable as the sunrise, as steady as a metronome.

I never thought of Billy Graham as a meaningful minister in my life. He preached a straight salvation message, salvation being something of a gateway drug, getting new Christians into the club where they can become world-weary, long-in-the-tooth believers, debating doctrine, hashing out hermeneutics, and splitting churches in huffy snits—you know, the fun stuff. Billy Graham was a 101 course, not a deep-waters guy.

And yet when I checked in, after his death, with my spiritual lode-stars, I realized that saying you're an evangelical Christian who doesn't plug into Billy Graham is like saying you're a country music fan without internalizing Hank Williams. Even if Hank meant nothing to you, he probably meant everything to every singer you respect.

My current pastor, Robert Hahn, who attended Graham's School of Evangelism, told me: "He was humble, yet he knew who he was—and without apology. He wasn't warm, he was powerful. And because of that, he came off as genuine."

My former pastor, Michael Easley, who went on to head the Moody Bible Institute, offered: "I'm reminded of D.L. Moody. When a woman criticized his way of doing evangelism, he responded, 'I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it.' . . . Graham exalted in Jesus, not him-

self. And millions got to see and hear the authentic article."

Then there is my mom, who holds high rank (aside from the fact that she brought me into this world), since many years ago, she led me to Christ, who, despite my doubts and lapses, I've generally stuck with. I don't remember Graham occupying a particular place of prominence in our house. Though in the '70s, as in so many other households, his televised crusades were part of the background entertainment, like *The White Shadow* or *Welcome Back, Kotter*.

On the day of his death, my mom related that Graham was never one of

her go-to preachers. He wasn't in her spiritual-growth starting lineup. Yet as she was saying this, her throat seized up and her voice choked. She couldn't finish her thought, as if she'd realized that the North Star had just flickered out. "What's wrong?" I asked. I assumed Billy Graham didn't mean that much to her. I assumed wrong.

"He led so many people to the Lord," she said. "He got the call at 16 and lived to 99. And all that time, he glorified God. What a homecoming it must have been today. What a celebration. To hear those words we all long to hear: 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.'"

COMMENT ♦ PHILIP TERZIAN

## The Angela Davis papers: Why would anyone want them?

I was struck by the convergence of two stories in a recent edition of the *New York Times*.

The first, on the front page, was an anodyne anniversary feature: The Berlin Wall, which went up in 1961 and came down in 1989, has now (in the *Times*'s words) been "gone for as long as it stood." The milestone was observed quietly in unified Germany, which has been grappling these past few decades with the problems of integrating West and East, with mixed success.

It's an old and, from my perspective, predictable story as well. For as one who first explored Erich Honecker's German Democratic Republic as a journalist in the 1970s and revisited several times thereafter, the fact that the reunion of the impoverished East and the prosperous Federal Republic of Germany has been a long and arduous one—still leaving the East at a measurable disadvantage—is far less surprising than the fact, still astonishing and exhilarating in retrospect, that the Soviet Union collapsed and the Berlin Wall was reduced to rubble.

Standing on either side of the famous landmark, I never imagined that the Cold War's ugliest meta-

phor would disappear in my lifetime. Indeed, the two impressions I always took away from Communist East Germany were sadness about the grim, repressive regime that seemed to penetrate every corner of its gray landscape and the evident stasis—the empty streets, furtive glances, shabby architecture, even the unreconstructed bomb damage from World War II—characteristic of the whole Kremlin empire. (And East Germany, lest we forget, was the economic "success story" of the Soviet bloc.)

Which makes the second story in that same *Times* edition either cruelly ironic or deeply obtuse: "The [Angela] Davis Papers: Harvard Gets Them."

According to the *Times* account, the Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study—surviving remnant of Harvard's old co-ordinate college for women—has purchased, for an undisclosed sum, "more than 150 boxes of papers, photographs, pamphlets and other material" from the archive of the veteran left-wing radical Angela Davis, who stands (in the words of the library's director, Jane Kamensky) "at the intersection of feminism, American political radical-

ism and global political radicalism.”

According to Harvard’s Henry Louis Gates Jr., Davis is “one of the major political theorists of the second half of the 20th century.” With all due respect to Professor Gates, who is no slouch at salesmanship, it is probably more accurate to describe Davis as a political activist rather than a theorist—evidence for which is comparatively thin—and, to a larger degree, an artifact of a passing generation of left-wing radicalism.

It is true that Davis, now 74, spent most of her career in and around the academy, where she initially parlayed her black nationalist credentials and East German doctorate into offers from Princeton and Swarthmore, settling, in 1969, at UCLA. She might well have remained in Los Angeles, just up Interstate 5 from her mentor, the German-born New Left philosopher Herbert Marcuse, at UC San Diego. But the call to action, then and always, stirred her more strongly than scholarship.

Her militant rhetoric had already attracted the critical attention of Governor Ronald Reagan and the University of California regents when guns she had registered were supplied to the teenaged brother of an inmate named George Jackson, who was facing trial for the murder of a prison guard and much lionized by the left.

Seeking to free his brother, Jonathan Jackson in August 1970 managed to gain control of a courtroom in San Rafael while a trial was underway. Jackson and three prisoners seized the judge, prosecutor, and three female jurors as hostages and briefly escaped from the courthouse. In an ensuing gun battle, however, Jackson and two of the prisoners were killed, along with Judge Harold Haley, who was shot in the head with a sawed-off shotgun.

Under California law, this ghastly melodrama made Angela Davis vulnerable to criminal charges of assisting a kidnapping and homicide, and

she became a fugitive. It is perhaps a measure of those times that when she was apprehended two months later in New York and returned to California for trial, she became a *cause célèbre* on the left, a nationwide campus hero, and global celebrity. Her now-familiar face and voluminous afro adorned thousands of “Free Angela” banners and posters, and she earned the admiration of other celebrities—Yoko Ono, Noam Chomsky, Jane Fonda, even the Rolling Stones.

Here, however, the story takes an



## It was into welcoming arms in Moscow and Havana and East Berlin and other bleak capitals of the Communist universe that Angela Davis threw herself for years on end.

interesting turn. For in June 1972, to the surprise of most Americans and in all likelihood Davis herself, she was acquitted on all counts by an all-white jury. No doubt she and her admirers were relieved by the verdict, which could easily have been deeply punitive. At the same time, the judicial martyrdom that would have guaranteed her icon status was denied her. When she embarked on a worldwide victory tour, which kept her out of the country for months on end, she disappeared from the American consciousness, never again a household name.

There was another irony as well. The late 1960s and early ’70s were a period of left-radical rebirth in America, but while Angela Davis was friendly to innumerable factions of the New Left—from Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) to the Black Panthers—she was also a member of the Communist party and twice in subsequent years (1980, 1984) its vice-presidential nominee.

It is difficult, now as then, to explain this incongruity. In the hip radical circles where Davis thrived in the Age of Aquarius, the Communist Party USA had become something of a joke—a downscale, arguably geriatric, collection of old labor insurgents and would-be spymasters in threadbare suits, singing “Joe Hill” and pledging strict allegiance to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

But of course, that was not the glamorous USSR of Leon Trotsky’s Bolshevik armies or John Reed and *Reds* (1981) but the squalid, puritanical, anti-Semitic, nuclear-armed autocracy of Leonid Brezhnev and his Kremlin council of elders. Not to mention the careerists, party hacks, and secret policemen led by Erich Honecker, who governed the East German state captured so poignantly in the *Times*’s other story.

It was into welcoming arms in Moscow and Havana and East Berlin and other bleak capitals of the Communist universe that Davis threw herself in common cause for years on end. And apart from a few startling detours in subsequent decades—solidarity with the Rev. Jim Jones of Peoples Temple/Jonestown fame, for example—she has since combined her radical activism with an enviable succession of faculty sinecures.

Not surprisingly, the *Times* account of Radcliffe’s newest treasure moves directly from the “Free Angela” days to that contemporary “intersection of feminism . . . and global political radicalism.” And apart from a photograph of some letters of support from East German schoolchildren, delivered during her trial, Davis’s adventures in the German Democratic Republic, celebrating the oppression of the victims described in that other *Times* story, go unmentioned.

To be sure, all of this tells us more about Harvard and the *New York Times* than about Angela Davis. But I do hope that the Davis papers in Radcliffe’s Schlesinger Library include her Lenin Peace Prize or, with luck, the Star of People’s Friendship, bestowed upon her by Erich Honecker himself. ♦

## Look who's stupid now

For decades, Republicans have been stuck with the epithet “the stupid party,” and they’ve often deserved it. But there’s been a switch in the Trump era. Democrats now are the stupid party.

They’ve adopted several of the foolhardy habits of Republicans—for instance, the government shutdown. It’s an act of political masochism. History is consistent on this. Those who shut Washington down fail to achieve their goals.

Despite this losing streak, Democrats decided on a shutdown to force President Trump and congressional Republicans to let immigrant “dreamers” stay in this country. The shutdown featured hours of Democratic handwringing.

It flopped, as every Republican shutdown had. Chuck Schumer, the Senate Democratic leader, called it off after a single day, upon realizing its chances of succeeding were zilch. Pro-shutdown Democrats wanted to hang on and picketed Schumer’s residence.

Schumer was wise to cut his losses. He balked at doing the same in the fight against the Trump tax cut, just as Republicans had been foolish to prolong the agony of trying to kill Obamacare. In both cases, the outcome was clear.

But not to House minority leader Nancy Pelosi, who proved in an eight-hour speech to be a know-nothing on taxes. That the tax cut would boost the economy and leave most Americans with more money was very likely. When the cuts showed up in paychecks last month, she dismissed them as “crumbs.” Now they’re popular and still she won’t let go. She’s blindly loyal to the party line she helped to create. Her party is embarrassed.

Democrats surely knew better from

watching Republicans stumble on Obamacare. But they ignored the lesson: When things go disastrously, stop and wait for a better day.

Republicans thought that day had come in 2010 with the arrival of the Tea Party. Its adherents flooded the primaries as candidates. Republicans won the House and should have captured the Senate—but didn’t. The reason: Too many poor candidates won primaries. GOP leaders didn’t intervene to promote better, more experienced candidates.

This year, the Resistance will dominate the Democratic primaries. The average number of candidates per primary is five. With the party drifting left, this could mean more far-left candidates with little chance of winning the general election. Democrats are flirting with danger.

But there’s more to Democrats’ emergence as the stupid party than emulating Republicans. What they’ve left undone has hurt, especially the lack of generational change in their leaders. They’re still the geezer party.

Representative Tim Ryan, 44, challenged Pelosi, 77, for House minority leader but lost by roughly 2-1. That represents the division between the geriatric caucus and the youth brigade.

And Democrats have tied themselves to two risky issues, gun control and immigration. Their desperation to discover a strategy to foster gun control was revealed when they enlisted high-school kids as their spokesmen post-Parkland. Teenagers versus the NRA? The odds favor the NRA.

On immigration, Democrats started out behind and have made matters worse in the past year by moving to what amounts to an open-borders position. That’s a loser and increas-

ingly so. Trump will feast on it in 2020.

In negotiating with Trump on immigration, Democrats have given themselves little flexibility. An incident reported by the *Washington Post* demonstrates this. As we all know, Trump had nasty words for Third World countries at a bipartisan meeting on immigration at the White House. And Democrats couldn’t resist leaking that he’d called them “s—holes.”

It was, the *Post* said, “an outburst that made it politically impossible for Democrats to accede to Trump’s demands to terminate a diversity visa lottery program.” That’s affirmative action for countries who send few immigrants here.

The Democratic blunder was refusing to compromise on taxes. This gave Republicans a free hand to kill the individual mandate imposed by Obamacare, open up Arctic oil drilling, and limit the deduction on state and local taxes. Schumer could have kept all three out of the tax bill. It was fear of a backlash from the Resistance for cooperating with Trump that prevented him from doing so.

These self-imposed problems don’t mean a weak performance in November. Democrats have structural advantages. The non-White House party almost invariably gains seats. That three dozen Republican seats are open helps enormously. Trump will be an albatross in some states.

Democrats envision the entire country voting as Virginia did last November in its governor’s race. It was a wave election spurred by deep dislike of Trump. But that mood is less intense today. And the rule of thumb is that if Republicans are less than 10 percentage points behind in the poll question of who voters favor in the midterm election, they hold onto the House. They currently trail by six points or so.

This question arises: Why didn’t Democrats enact immigration reform that includes legal status for dreamers in Obama’s first two years, when they had super-majorities in both houses of Congress? Having passed Obamacare, they figured that would be too much, too soon. That was before they became the stupid party. ♦





Graham preaching in St. Paul, Minnesota, July 13, 1973

# An Evangelical Saint

Billy Graham, 1918-2018.

BY BARTON SWAIM

**A**t the height of his influence in the 1960s and '70s, Billy Graham was a man about whom nearly every adult in America had an opinion. He was everywhere—his weeklong evangelistic “crusades” packed stadiums around the globe; innumerable books and articles carried his byline; his face appeared on the covers of the newsweeklies. The Graham media empire included a magazine, a radio show, and a television program.

America’s most famous preacher died on February 21 at the age of 99. Younger Americans who don’t remember the crusades and his other public addresses may wonder how on earth an “evangelist”—the word itself sounds obsolete—could have achieved such vast renown in a secularized country. That it isn’t quite so secularized as it might be is in large measure the work of Billy Graham.

In the late 1930s, Graham, who’d grown up outside Charlotte, North Carolina, was a student at a tiny

Bible college in Florida. He practiced preaching alone in front of mirrors and standing atop tree stumps in the forest. Soon he was preaching in large churches, so captivating were his oratory and his message. By 1944, he had his own radio program in Chicago. In the fall of 1947, he held his first independent “revival”—several nights of preaching meant to draw the unbelieving to Christ and Christians to greater faithfulness. Before one of those revivals in Los Angeles in 1949, the media magnate William Randolph Hearst decreed that reporters at the *Los Angeles Examiner* should “puff Graham.” So began the evangelist’s rapid rise to American sainthood.

Nobody watching old clips of Graham would attribute his success to media puffery. He was uncommonly handsome, spoke with a lovely baritone lilt, and moved with a gentlemanly grace. His whole persona projected sincerity. For six decades, Graham lay under the scrutiny of a skeptical media—as early as 1957 the liberal *Christian Century* magazine hired an investigative reporter to find

evidence of financial or other improprieties—but he was never credibly accused of either personal or financial misconduct. In 1994, he was discovered to have spoken disparagingly of Jews to Richard Nixon, but it’s clear from the transcript that his animus was against moral permissivists rather than Jews as Jews and that he was mainly guilty of trying too hard not to disagree with the president. In any case it’s difficult to call a man a racist who in the 1950s forcefully chastised Southern audiences over segregation.

The Graham crusades were often said to signify a national religious awakening. Millions came to hear a preacher preach a simple message: that man may be saved from his sins by confessing them to Jesus Christ, son of God, and placing faith exclusively in him for eternal life. That message sounded as shocking and implausible then as it does now, yet people flocked to hear it. There was power in what Billy Graham said and in the way he said it, some quality of plainspoken truth that even those who disagreed with him on important questions found appealing and persuasive. It’s impossible to see photographs of the massive crowds gathered to hear Graham speak—a packed Yankee Stadium in 1957, more than a million on an airstrip in Seoul—and conclude that it was just some fad.

But Graham’s singular achievement was not in drawing people to his meetings; it was in his challenge to the dominance of midcentury Protestant liberalism. After World War II, attendance in the American churches now known as “mainline”—the Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Episcopal, Church of Christ, and Disciples of Christ denominations—was at its peak. But cultural prestige and political influence had come at the cost of confessional clarity; the mainline denominations were (as indeed they still are) more interested in keeping up with the fast-evolving morality of our popular culture than in challenging it. By the late 1950s, many Christians were realizing that there wasn’t much point in busying oneself with church if it required no special belief other

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BETTMANN / GETTY

than a general assent that being good is better than being bad.

Graham showed Americans that Christianity, if it was true at all, placed demands on them, and they had to respond with a yes or a no. He realized that Christian belief wasn't worth the trouble if it involved no risk and no sacrifice. Jesus' disciples weren't martyred for espousing some form of elevated do-goodism; they were martyred for believing that Jesus was the eternal son of God and that he was raised from the dead, bodily and not spiritually or metaphorically, on the third day.

Graham himself was never too fastidious in his theological adherence. Conservative evangelicals criticized him for his indistinct pronouncements and for freely associating with charismatics and Catholics and anybody else who professed belief in the biblical Jesus. But it was Graham more than almost anybody else who brought the basic doctrines of Christianity back into the homes of millions of Americans.

He embodied and foreshadowed the rise of modern American evangelicism—its strengths and its follies. Graham and his organization valued method and numbers over depth of belief. Millions made “decisions for Christ” at Graham crusades over the decades, and today’s evangelical megachurches boast enormous congregations. But it was never obvious how all those impressive numbers translated into a more definably Christian nation or a more morally upright culture.

Like the younger evangelicals he led and influenced, Graham believed that he could change American society from the top. Hence his dabbling in presidential politics and hobnobbing with successive occupants of the White House from Lyndon Johnson to George W. Bush. He always claimed not to be interested in elections or candidates, but his critics were right that there was something unseemly about a clergyman always hanging around the most powerful man in the world. His close friendships with Nixon and Bill Clinton damaged Graham’s reputation. When these men left the White House, so evidently the willing victims of their own base impulses,

Graham looked like the ineffective spiritual adviser he had in fact been.

Anyone who stays in the public eye for half a century says too much. Graham was not a publicity hound—he turned down lucrative offers to host network television shows and star in movies. But a man who speaks all the time will say things in the absence of knowledge. In 1969, he wrote a long letter to Nixon advising the president on the best way to wind down the Vietnam War (“Use North Vietnamese defectors to bomb and invade the north. . . . Let them bomb the dikes which could overnight destroy the economy of North Vietnam”). After a visit to the Soviet Union in 1984, he claimed that Christians in Russia could worship largely as they pleased. In his 1997 autobiography, *Just As I Am*, he remarked that seeing Auschwitz led

him to embrace nuclear disarmament. Twice he remarked, in flat contradiction to everything he had taught for decades, that it was possible to find eternal life without ever knowing the name of Jesus Christ. One wishes he could have kept the biblical proverb more firmly in mind: “In a multitude of words there wanteth not sin.”

He was not a great or even a reliable thinker, but Billy Graham was a good and peaceable man who used his gifts to reanimate Christian belief in America at a time when it seemed in danger of mutating into an empty and derivative moralism. Today’s media and intellectual elite look back at him with barely veiled contempt. But American society has often been shaped and bettered by men who knew just one truth and who expressed it well. Billy Graham was such a man. ♦

# The Monster Next Door

Serial killers and school shooters.

BY ETHAN EPSTEIN

**N**ikolas Cruz delighted in torturing animals. The Florida school shooter is reported to have killed frogs and squirrels, and sicced a dog on a neighbor’s piglets. Cruz’s social media feeds were replete with images of dead and maimed critters, apparently hurt by his own hand.

Cruz is not alone in taking perverse pleasure in harming the helpless among us. Jeffrey Dahmer, David Berkowitz (known popularly as the Son of Sam), and Ted Bundy were all prolific animal torturers. And all, of course, went on to long careers as serial murderers of their fellow humans.

Serial killing, that quintessential American phenomenon and

existential fear of the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s, has declined. Measuring this precisely is difficult—there can be serial killers operating without our knowledge (if, say, authorities haven’t yet managed to link a series of deaths to one perpetrator), and where one pegs murders as “serial” is inherently subjective—but the numbers seem incontrovertible. One study from criminologists at Radford University finds an 85 percent decline in American serial killing from its peak in the early 1980s. Instances of mass shootings, meanwhile, like the atrocity we just witnessed in Florida, have risen sharply, a 2014 FBI study determined.

Determining precisely why this happened is extremely difficult, but it’s enough to raise a question: Is the personality type that 40 years ago

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might have been attracted to serial killing now more likely to become a mass shooter? Had he been born in, say, 1962 rather than 1998, would Cruz have looked to Ted Bundy, rather than, say, a Columbine killer, for inspiration?

Probably not, criminologists say. Mass killing and serial murder are “two very different phenomena,” says Harold Schechter, CUNY professor

the most common form of mass murder, according to McCrary.)

All serial killers are psychopaths—they are unable to experience empathy and indeed take pleasure in the pain of others. This is increasingly considered a neurological condition, one that appears to begin at birth.

By contrast, there are a “variety of different motivations” among mass killers, McCrary says. Some are

more alarming conclusion. Researching a plethora of school shootings, Gladwell found something strange and frightening: A growing number of school shooters were, in many respects, normal. They were not psychopathic, not insane, not from abusive homes. They weren’t bullied or socially isolated. So what could be driving their behavior?

Gladwell likened the growing plague of school shootings to how riots spread. A riot is a “case of destructive violence that involves a great number of otherwise quite normal people who would not usually be disposed to violence,” he wrote. Likewise, it might make sense to “think of [school shootings] as a slow-motion, ever-evolving riot, in which each new participant’s action makes sense in reaction to and in combination with those who came before.” What began with psychopaths like Harris now encompasses the (relatively) healthy and well-adjusted.

It’s not as simple as saying that mass shooters want fame, and that therefore media outlets should refuse to publicize their names, as some prominent editors have pledged. Nor is every case of mass killing a simple issue of “mental health.” Rather, it seems, there is a cultural contagion at work. Witness the dozens of copycat threats that have been issued in the wake of the Florida slaughter. Some were more than threats; in several cases across the country, students were found with caches of weapons. And not all of those would-be perpetrators are psychopaths. The frightening implication is that some number among the “normal” are now regularly contemplating mass murder.

And that’s why it’s telling that the 1970s and ’80s saw what Harold Schechter calls a “cultural fascination” with serial killing. That has now declined, “replaced by a fixation on mass murder,” he says. As long as that particular cultural obsession remains dominant, we’re likely to see more mass killers. Born that way, psychopaths will always be with us. But mass killers are in many cases a product of our society.



Accused Parkland shooter Nikolas Cruz in court in Ft. Lauderdale, February 19

and author of the *The Serial Killer Files*. Serial killing is often a form of “lust murder,” a “sadistic sex crime” with the killer often achieving orgasm during or after the event. Adam Lankford, criminologist at the University of Alabama, agrees: “There are often sadistic and sexual elements in serial killing which don’t appear in mass shooting,” he says. There are no known cases of a mass killer having a sexual experience during his deed.

Serial killers, moreover, try to “avoid detection,” notes retired FBI profiler Gregg McCrary, whereas mass killers often die at the end of their acts or, at a minimum, certainly don’t plan on getting away with it. Serial killers also typically kill strangers, while most “mass shooters know their victims,” McCrary says. They might commit their murders at the school they were expelled from, the workplace that fired them, or the home of the wife who kicked them out. (The murder of multiple family members is

indeed psychopaths: Eric Harris of Columbine infamy displayed strong psychopathic tendencies, as Dave Cullen revealed in his 2009 book *Columbine*. And some, like Jared Lee Loughner, who shot congresswoman Gabby Giffords and murdered six others at an Arizona grocery store, are plainly insane.

The vast majority of mass shooters, however, appear to be neither. They may be “angry” or “insecure” or “jealous,” McCrary says, or full of “rage,” as Schechter puts it. In other words, their emotions tend to be those of a normal human—but their reactions go to vicious, abnormal extremes. In this sense, Cruz’s history of hurting animals was in fact telling. It’s not necessarily a predictor of *serial* killing per se, but indeed, “violence against socially valued animals is a strong predictor of adult violence,” McCrary tells me.

A brilliant 2015 *New Yorker* piece by Malcolm Gladwell came to an even

# How to Dig Up Dirt from the Russians

The Clinton professionals versus the Trump amateurs. **BY ERIC FELTEN**

**S**pecial counsel Robert Mueller's February 16 indictment of 13 Russians and three Russian companies for interfering with the 2016 election fits with much that we already know. The Russians were opportunistic, stirring the pot and turning up on both sides of the partisan divide. This holds true not only for the frenetic and often laughable social media efforts of the Red Troll Army, chronicled in the indictment, but also for the rather more serious efforts of other Russians to involve themselves in the campaigns of both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

The fact that accusations of collusion with Russia have dogged the president and not Clinton isn't just because it was Trump who won the election. Nor is it just a matter of the mainstream media focusing on Republican sins. It reflects the strategic advantages of the Clinton team's professionalism, including the use of multiple cutouts and intermediaries. Trump's improvisatory amateurism compares poorly with the Clinton team's practiced tradecraft.

We know that at least some significant Trump team-members were enthusiastic about getting dirt on Hillary from Russians. Told by a British publicist that "the Crown prosecutor of Russia" could "provide the Trump campaign with some official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary," Donald Trump Jr. infamously replied that "if it's what you say I love it especially later in the summer." Don Jr. proceeded to arrange for a June 9, 2016, meeting at Trump

Tower. The participants: campaign boss Paul Manafort, Ivanka Trump's husband Jared Kushner, Don Jr., and some Russians. It is a measure of the Trump team's slapdash planning that



*Glenn Simpson arrives on Capitol Hill, November 14, 2017.*

not only had they failed to do any due diligence on their Russian guests, they hadn't even been told their names. Even more amateurish was the fact that senior Trump aides were taking such a direct meeting in the first place.

The leader of the small group of Russians at Trump Tower that day was lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya. And instead of delivering the dirt that had been promised, she wanted to talk about the sanctions on Russian nationals implicated in human rights abuses, sanctions imposed by a U.S. law known as the Magnitsky Act.

It wasn't the first time that day Veselnitskaya had tangled over the Magnitsky Act. In the morning, she had been at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit for a hearing involving Prevezon, a Russian-owned real estate firm she represented. She

was there with her American legal team, from the firm BakerHostetler. Among the Baker crew was Glenn Simpson, honcho of Fusion GPS—the same firm retained through intermediaries by the Clinton campaign and Democratic National Committee to produce the anti-Trump "dossier."

Simpson and Fusion GPS had been working at the direction of Veselnitskaya for two years, in an effort to dig up dirt on the Magnitsky Act's driving force, financier William Browder. Except, as Simpson was quick to point out when questioned on Capitol Hill, he wasn't hired by the Russian lawyer. He was hired, rather, by Baker-Hostetler, which Simpson described to House investigators as "a big Mid-western Republican-oriented law firm that is one of my oldest clients."

As to the prime mover, Simpson was in the dark. "We didn't know much about the client," he said. Knowing about the client was Baker's job: "Obviously, the lawyers have responsibility to evaluate whether the client is engaged in anything improper, and they certainly have to determine the source of their funds."

There are notable advantages to having a law firm act as a cutout. In this case, it provides deniability should one ever be asked about one's work for the Russians. House investigators asked Simpson if it gave him pause that his anti-Browder oppo-work was helpful to Vladimir Putin. Simpson's response: "I prepared this research in connection with an American lawsuit for an American law firm."

Which isn't to say that Simpson didn't eventually come to know the Russian who was writing the checks. Not only was he there in court with Veselnitskaya on the day she would go to Trump Tower, he was among a group who had dinner with her in New York the night before. And, oh yes, he also happened to be at dinner with Veselnitskaya the next evening at a Washington restaurant.

Someone with a suspicious mind might be inclined to look askance at the fact that the Russian who reached out to Don Jr. just happened to dine with the man behind the dossier,

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PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVAIS / AP

both before and after her meeting at Trump Tower. But Simpson told the House Intelligence Committee that it was pure coincidence. “To be clear, I didn’t know about this meeting before it happened, and I didn’t know about it after it happened.”

Simpson is no fool and, nudged by the ranking Democrat on the committee, Rep. Adam Schiff, he allowed that the coincidence might raise eyebrows: “I would certainly agree with the observation that for these matters to have intersected in the way they did is, you know, remarkable.” You can judge for yourself how persuasive Simpson is in his further claim that Veselnitskaya’s trip to Trump Tower “caught me totally by surprise, and I have spent a lot of time thinking about what it means, if it means anything. And as best as I can figure,” Simpson said, “the Russians were up to a lot of stuff.”

**T**he Russians were indeed up to a lot of stuff. And there’s every reason to believe that Russian efforts to enlist American collaborators (unwitting and otherwise) extended to both parties.

Consider the dossier prepared for Simpson and Fusion GPS by onetime British spy Christopher Steele. If the dossier is to be believed (admittedly a big if), Steele’s anonymous sources were almost entirely Russian. “Source A” was “a senior Russian Foreign Ministry figure,” according to Steele; Source B, “a former top level Russian intelligence officer still active inside the Kremlin”; Source C, “a senior Russian financial official”; Source G, “a senior Kremlin official.” In other words, Hillary Clinton’s campaign was paying for dirt acquired from senior figures in Moscow.

Given the dossier’s impact—it spawned government surveillance of Trump associates during and after the election—why is it not a scandal that the document appears to have been prepared in—let’s go ahead and use the word—collusion with Russian sources? In no small part, this is because Clinton was careful to keep her fingerprints off the dossier. Between the Clinton campaign and the Russian officials dishing

dirt on Trump were multiple intervening layers: Steele worked for Simpson and Fusion GPS; Fusion GPS worked for the Democratic law firm Perkins Coie; the law firm was paid by the Democratic National Committee and Hillary for America.

Just how useful it can be to have so many intermediaries can be discerned in the House question of Simpson: “Did the DNC or the Hillary Clinton campaign for presidency ever direct Christopher Steele to discuss the contents of his dossier with the media that you’re aware of?” House counsel asked Simpson last November. Simpson responded, “I was the one that directed him to do that.”

“Did you do that of your own volition,” the investigator pressed, “or did you do that at the direction of a client or another entity?”

“I want to be as helpful as I can without getting into client communications,” Simpson said. “So I guess I would like to say generally, I mean—generally when reporters—when we have to deal with the press, we would inform our clients that we were doing—you know, in any case if you’re dealing with the press, it’s incumbent on you to, you know, make sure your client knows that.”

Somewhere in that fog is an admission that, if not Hillary, or if not Hillary’s campaign, or if not the DNC—who knows which of his clients Simpson is talking about?—at least Perkins Coie was in on the effort to brief reporters on the dossier.

Simpson explained that he directed Steele to go to the press with the dossier because he “was angry” about James Comey’s announcement in late October, less than two weeks before the election, that the FBI was reopening its investigation into Hillary over her emails: “We tried to decide how to respond to that,” Simpson told investigators, but was then quick to add: “And when I say ‘we,’ I mean like me and my little, you know, company, and Chris [Steele] and, you know—I didn’t have any dealings with Mrs. Clinton or any of these other people.”

After fishing for who might have given the go-ahead to spread the

dossier far and wide, the House investigator doubled back: “You said ‘We had to decide how to respond.’ Who is ‘we’ in that statement?”

“It’s mainly a reference to myself and to Chris,” Simpson replied. “You know, it was mainly between Chris and myself.” Note the repeated use of the word “mainly,” which means there might have been any number of other players in on the decision.

“Anyone else?” the House lawyer pressed.

“You know, I am not going to get into client communications, but, you know, I was still working for a client at that time.”

“Did you discuss with your client how to respond?” Simpson’s lawyer jumps in: “I think that is confidential.” Again, one sees here the advantage of campaigns’ outsourcing such work to a law firm.

In the indictment of the 13 Russian nationals last week, Mueller posited that they had been pursuing “a strategic goal to sow discord in the U.S. political system.” Wittingly or not, both campaigns seem to have played into their hands. The president’s partisans are wrong to think that the Clinton campaign’s solicitation of dirt from Russian informants somehow absolves them of blame for their own shenanigans. The same goes for the Clinton camp, which acts as if Trump’s hands being dirty must prove that its own are clean.

The Russians may well have offered dirt to both campaigns. The difference in how such entreaties played out could have everything to do with the relative rigor and discipline of the competing campaigns. Trump had the likes of George Papadopoulos, a blundering neophyte who bluffed his way onto the campaign’s foreign-policy advisory group and was soon drunkenly bragging in a London bar that he knew Russians had Hillary’s emails and had been mining them for compromising material. Hillary had the likes of tight-lipped professionals such as Simpson and the seasoning to keep layers of lawyers, with all the confidential privileges they bring, between herself and anyone who might be engaged in dirty tricks. ♦

# Can California Lurch Leftward?

The Resistance targets seven seats in the Central Valley and Los Angeles suburbs. **BY TONY MECIA**

*Modesto, Calif.*  
On election night 2016, political activist Jess Self wasn't in much of a partying mood. She'd just spent four days knocking on doors in neighboring Nevada. Her efforts helped elect a Democratic U.S. senator and representative and pass two controversial ballot measures.

But Donald Trump's victory spoiled any sense of a job well done, and she skipped the Las Vegas celebrations. "It was a rough night," recalls Self, 36, a public defender in Modesto, a city about 90 minutes east of San Francisco. "It was one of the biggest shocks of my life."

She returned home the next day and regrouped. Then she started making calls. Self, president of the Central Valley Democratic Club, helped fire up Democrats and channel their anger into a political operation. This year, they are setting their sights on knocking off four-term Republican representative Jeff Denham. They've had record attendance at their meetings, the phone banks are packed, and 50 to 80 volunteers knock on doors every Saturday to spread the word. The election isn't for eight months. "I have never, never seen anything like this," Self reports.

Democrats nationwide are banking on such grassroots enthusiasm to win back the House in November. To succeed, they need a particularly strong showing in the few parts of California they don't already dominate.

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"It's kind of amazing: Democrats control 39 of the 53 seats in California, and yet, in order to take the House back, they will probably have to win even more," says Kyle Kondik, who analyzes congressional elections



*Agitating against GOP incumbent Jeff Denham outside a Riverbank, California, event with the congressman, May 9, 2017*

for the University of Virginia's Center for Politics. The biggest battlegrounds are in seven districts held by Republicans in the Central Valley and the Los Angeles suburbs. By Kondik's calculations, Democrats will have to flip five of them.

It's not an impossible task: Hillary Clinton won all seven districts in 2016, and Republican incumbents in two of them are retiring. The California GOP, which once produced popular governors such as Ronald Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger, hasn't won a statewide race since 2006. The party is in decline in the state, with only 25 percent of registered voters identifying as Republican. Polls show residents view President Trump less favorably here than in almost any other state. Yet as the race to win in Modesto shows, the Democrats must overcome obstacles in California, too.

California's Central Valley lies between the Sierra Nevada mountains and the Pacific. Modesto, the largest city in the 10th Congressional District, with a population of 200,000, is surrounded by almond orchards and industrial buildings connected to farming. Historical markers downtown pay tribute to the town's most famous native son, filmmaker George Lucas, and to the cruising and drag-racing scene that he depicted in his 1973 hit *American Graffiti*.

While farming and food processing remain the major employers, Modesto has changed a lot in 45 years. Latinos now comprise 45 percent of the population. With lower housing prices, the area also attracts spillover from the high-priced Bay Area.

Clinton won here by 3 points in 2016, which offers Democrats hope in their quest to unseat Denham. The incumbent is a conventional Republican, who had a 16-year career in the Air Force and then started a plastics business. He voted with his party to replace Obamacare and to pass tax cuts—though he is softer on immigration issues than

Trump and the party hardliners. The *Los Angeles Times* says Denham "has had the secret sauce to keep his constituents happy even as Democrats have salivated to flip a district seemingly so perfect for their party." He beat beekeeper Michael Eggman by 3 points in 2016 and by 12 points in 2014.

Democrats are hoping to paint Denham, 50, as a Trump enabler. Asked about his support for the president, Denham says he is a "very independent thinker" who is focused on the district's needs. "I'm not just going to go along to get along when it hurts my district," he says. He points to his efforts to bring more water to the Central Valley—which a news release from his office calls a "social justice issue"—and his successful push to secure funding for training more local doctors.

Denham, who speaks Spanish, is already running ads on

Spanish-language radio stations to keep his name in front of that crucial constituency. In 2016, internal polling indicated he would earn nearly half of the Latino vote, a figure far higher than for most Republicans.

There remains a deep well of conservatism in the Central Valley. Ratings for the radio shows of Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity are strong. A Lincoln Day dinner address by Ann Coulter last April brought out 600 guests who paid \$125 and up. Business leaders cast blame on Sacramento Democrats, not Washington Republicans, for the area's woes. Poverty and unemployment are higher than national averages, yet Democrats in charge of state government pile on regulations and taxes that hamper business.

"We never recovered from the recession in the valley, and the Democrats don't care," says Cecil Russell, CEO of the Modesto Chamber of Commerce. "Sacramento taxes the hell out of you every chance they get." Asked if business owners support Denham, Russell pauses, cocks his head to the side, and replies, "Any of us with a brain do."

Another advantage Denham enjoys is that Democrats have yet to settle on a challenger. With so many Democrats running, the strongest candidates could split the votes in the June 5 primary and allow a weaker candidate through to the general election. There are at least eight declared challengers—including two nurses, a venture capitalist, an ex-congressional aide, a retired computer programmer, a former small-town mayor, and the owner of an organic nut-processing plant.

In January, Eggman, the beekeeper who lost twice to Denham, reversed a pledge not to run and announced his candidacy, too. Democrats in the district say there are rumors that Eggman flip-flopped at the behest of wealthy and powerful political action committees, which were unnerved at the prospect of a little-known competitor facing off against Denham. Eggman didn't reply to a request for comment. But his entry into the race enraged some local Democrats, who teed off on his Facebook page: "You're

just here to screw up what was a good race." "Way to split the party and give Denham another win. Good job!" "I am so angry that you think you can sashay in at this late date and do anything BUT throw a monkey wrench into the hard grassroots labors of candidates who take this seriously."

fundraising and can add to it while the Democrats are spending money fighting each other. He had raised nearly \$2 million through the end of December, more than twice as much as a typical House incumbent, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. Aided by an influx of cash from

## California Dreamin'

To win control of the House in 2018, Democrats need to pick up 24 seats in November. That will require a strong showing in California, where Democrats now hold nearly three-quarters of House seats. Here are the California races that Democrats believe offer the best shots:

DISTRICT	INCUMBENT	2016 RESULT
CA-10	<b>Jeff Denham</b> (R)	Clinton +3
CA-21	<b>David Valadao</b> (R)	Clinton +15
CA-25	<b>Steve Knight</b> (R)	Clinton +7
CA-39	<b>Ed Royce</b> * (R)	Clinton +9
CA-45	<b>Mimi Walters</b> (R)	Clinton +5
CA-48	<b>Dana Rohrabacher</b> (R)	Clinton +2
CA-49	<b>Darrell Issa</b> * (R)	Clinton +8

\* Not running (open seat)

The candidates, minus Eggman, held three debates across the district between September and January. The *Modesto Bee* described the third debate, held before a sell-out crowd of nearly 500 in the downtown Gallo Center for the Arts, as filled with "Denham venom." Candidates voiced support for a new federal equal-rights amendment, zero government limits on abortion, and civil-rights protections for people who identify as transgender—positions that might excite the base but would be less popular with socially conservative farmworkers and independent voters.

In a Democratic party caucus in late January, candidates Josh Harder and T.J. Cox led the field. Harder, a 31-year-old venture capitalist in San Francisco, took a leave from his job and moved back to the district just last spring to make his first run for office. Cox, 53, ran for Congress in 2006 and is the founder of a community development fund—and owner of the nut processing plant—but he moved to the district from Fresno only last summer.

Denham holds a big lead in

tech and finance executives, Harder led Democrats with \$923,000. Cox had raised \$407,000.

Self, the president of the local Democratic club, predicts Democrats will set aside any differences once they have a nominee in June. The work they are doing now—holding mock funeral processions in front of Denham's office to protest his healthcare vote, knocking on doors, making calls—is laying the groundwork for the fall campaign, she thinks. Her group is trying to educate voters about the Democratic vision to improve health care and schools and to provide affordable housing. "The partisanship here is toned down compared to other areas," she says. "It's not going to help just to say, 'Trump sucks.'"

Part of the challenge is appealing to voters such as Cesar Lopez, 42, a Modesto plumber who was sitting in a rare patch of sun downtown one recent morning. Lopez says he voted for a third-party candidate for president in 2016 and is undecided on this year's congressional race. He says the plumbing business is good, and he

just put an offer on his first house. He likes some things Trump is doing, especially after conversations with his father, a Trump supporter who believes the president is a “go-getter” who “doesn’t walk away” from challenges like North Korea.

“He wouldn’t hesitate to protect his country,” Lopez says. “We’d be in danger if Hillary had to deal with that. Not because she’s a woman, but because of her history.”

Down the street, Robert Leibold, 66, of neighboring Tuolumne County,

said he and his wife, Dawn, believe the country has “gone downhill in the last year in a lot of ways.” They oppose the Republican tax cuts and efforts to remove people who came to the United States illegally as children and worry that Trump’s rhetoric is making it acceptable “to be a bigot now.”

Leibold, who votes consistently for Democrats, says they might see some victories this year. Jess Self, though, is sure Democratic enthusiasm will deliver: “We’re going to win this seat. It’s going to happen.” ♦

# Will There Always Be an Italy?

The question hanging over voters’ heads.

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL



A protest in Rome against immigration from Islamic countries, January 28, 2017

**S**ince January, the most important person in the campaign for the Italian elections coming on March 4 has been a missing person. Sad selfies of Pamela Mastropietro, a troubled 18-year-old from Rome, have appeared on the front pages of Italy’s

newspapers since her body was found, chopped up, rinsed with bleach, and packed into two wheeled suitcases, outside the city of Macerata, northeast of Rome. Four recent Nigerian migrants to Italy were arrested for the deed. They are among the millions of newcomers who have found their way north across the Mediterranean and, in just a few years, altered the fabric of Italian life.

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A few days after the discovery of Mastropietro’s body, 28-year-old Luca Traini, whom press photos show with runes tattooed on his skull, wrapped himself (literally) in the Italian flag and began shooting Africans in the center of Macerata, wounding six. Over the years, Western politicians have perfected a playbook of calming clichés for moments like these. The Italian candidates did not follow it. Their condemnation of Traini was neither swift nor categorical. Former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, the 81-year-old media billionaire who has dominated Italian politics since the end of the Cold War, has made a mighty comeback in this election, even though judges have blocked him from running for the top post again. Berlusconi said that the illegal immigrants now in the country were a “social bomb” waiting to go off. Matteo Salvini, leader of the Lega Nord, descended from a northern separatist party, said that “anyone who shoots someone is a delinquent,” but he blamed “out-of-control” immigration, which he likened to an invasion. Both men and their parties shot up in the polls. On the eve of elections, three conservative parties appeared likely to take 283 of the 630 seats in parliament. The more liberal Democratic party was at 158 and falling rapidly. The anti-establishment Five Star Movement, with 152 seats, looked set to be the single largest party.

A lot of Italians believe they are going to the polls to answer the question: *Do you want there to be an Italy or not?* In the early days of February, Istat, the national statistical office, published some population data that shocked even demographic pessimists. In 2017, Italy had 2 percent fewer births and 5 percent more deaths than the year before. Since the end of the 20th century Italy has been producing children at rates close to the lowest ever seen in human history: 1.34 children per woman. It is now entering the “low-fertility trap” that demographers have warned about. The population fell by 100,000 from the past year—a decline that is bound to accelerate.

STEFANO MONTESI / CORBIS / GETTY

Migration is swelling because people across the Mediterranean can sense this. Once those immigrants have arrived in sufficient numbers, the alarming population statistics will stabilize, but this will only disguise, not alter, the underlying demographic trend. Giorgia Meloni, whose conservative Brothers for Italy party is looking to form a coalition with Berlusconi and the Lega, says she is running “in order that Italians not disappear.”

Italians have seen for a while that there is something broken in their system. The Five Star Movement (M5S), a mostly online group founded by the comedian Beppe Grillo, came within a hair’s breadth of winning the last national elections in 2013. The M5S accuses *la casta*—Italy’s tight-knit group of business and political elites—of corruption, and has sometimes ruled out having anything to do with the major parties at all. It may have a point. Italy is handcuffed by nearly \$3 trillion in debt, which a plummeting population does not improve the prospects for financing. And yet the parties persist in making the most profligate electoral promises. Berlusconi’s Forza Italia promises a flat tax (which also would be a steep cut), while offering a guaranteed basic income of \$15,000 a year. This last is an idea that he stole from the M5S, which would at least try to finance it by pushing up estate taxes.

M5S’s skepticism about politics as usual crosses ideologies. Many of its voters are appalled at the way progressives in the political establishment have permitted unbridled immigration. But they do not trust conservatives like Berlusconi or even Salvini to bridle it. Whether the M5S would join any coalition has been the subject of much discussion. But when an intransigent protest party takes a quarter of the seats in a parliamentary election, a shutdown of the system is a real threat.

This year, *la casta* has been fighting back, arguing that M5S is a party as untrustworthy as the rest of them. Former prime minister Matteo Renzi,

the Democratic party’s lead candidate, has dismissed them as “freeloaders, crooks, and freemasons.” A Berlusconi-linked television show accused M5S members of parliament of irregularities in filing expenses and of failing, in a few cases, to honor a promise to donate part of their salaries to support Italian small business. The affair has become known as *Rimborsopoli*, “-opoli” being an Italian particle like



*Yawn: Gentiloni to the rescue?*

our “gate” that gets attached to the end of every political scandal.

Like the French Socialists and German Social Democrats who have seen their votes crater in recent elections, the Italian Democratic party is struggling to find a *raison d'être*. Renzi and his colleagues suffer, as the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper puts it, from “the fact that they only express an opinion on important issues after their opponents have done so.” Their problems go even deeper than that. In the early years of globalization, parties that in the industrial age had represented workingmen were able to pump up votes by abandoning their old constituents for new ones. This was a bonanza for a few electoral cycles, until the party’s traditional voters realized they had been not just jilted but tricked. That happened to Italian social democrats as surely as it did to American Democrats. Renzi spent two years pushing a referendum to reform the Senate and strengthen his own central government, even hiring

Barack Obama’s adviser Jim Messina to run it. When he lost by almost 20 points, he had to resign.

The Socialist party’s internal travails have rendered less logical an Italian system that was illogical to begin with. Renzi’s replacement, Paolo Gentiloni, is a political wallflower, a placeholder, an unassuming and unambitious-seeming politician. For that reason, he has gradu-

ally become the most popular politician in the country, the only prime minister in a quarter-century whose approval ratings—which now stand at the astronomical, for Italy, level of 47 percent—have risen during his term. And although Renzi, as the leader of the Democrats, is their official candidate for prime minister, he would never have the votes to take that office back. Should the elections produce no clear winner, Gentiloni could be the first choice to head an interim or technocratic government.

European pundits, journalists, and commentators are almost unanimously in favor of the European Union. They have spent much of this election season, particularly since the death of Pamela Mastropietro, fretting that the Italian elections could topple another anti-European domino. First the intransigence against migration policy laid down by Poland and Hungary, then Brexit, now Italy, and next . . . ?

But serious strife awaits even if Italy’s government does not turn on the E.U. As in Germany, the public has mobilized against an unpopular coalition government, with especial contempt for the touchy-feely social democrats who have been steering it. It is too early to rule out a result similar to the dangerous one that Germany’s elections produced—a return to power of the government the public repudiated with an even larger role for the very forces the public liked least. It’s okay when voting produces results that are unacceptable to elites—democracy is supposed to work that way. What is more dangerous is when voting produces results unacceptable to voters. ♦



State and Lake  
Streets, 1953

# Chicago, Then and Now

*It is the best of times, it is the worst of times*

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BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

**T**he big news out of Chicago, city of my birth and upbringing, is murder. According to a reliable website called HeyJackass!, during 2017, someone in Chicago was shot every 2 hours and 27 minutes and murdered every 12 hours and 59 minutes. There were 679 murders and 2,936 people shot in the city. This, for those who like their deviancy defined down, is an improvement over 2016, when 722 people were murdered and 3,658 shot. The overwhelming preponderance of these people, victims and murderers both, are black, and the crimes committed chiefly in black neighborhoods on the city's south and west

sides. Many of the murders were among the sorts of gangs long familiar in Chicago, which over the years has seen the Egyptian Cobras, the Blackstone Rangers, the Disciples, and the Conservative Vice Lords, among many others. According to a 2008 Department of Justice report, something like 100,000 members of up to 75 gangs were operating in the city. Gang involvement in drug trafficking has upped the stakes and intensified the violence in many of the city's black neighborhoods.

Who to blame for this wretched, hideous, and genuinely barbarous situation? The city's police, its politicians, its schools, its black leadership, contemporary black culture—all have come in for their share of accusations. But then Chicago has a rich tradition of murder. As early as 1910, the city led the nation in homicides and was known as the murder capital of the country. Much of the violence then and through the years of Prohibition was committed by organized crime. As late as the 1950s, when you told people you were from Chicago, they not uncommonly

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BETTMANN / GETTY

pretended to hoist a tommy gun and rat-a-tat-tatted away in reference to the bloody days of Al Capone and Co.

Chicagoans long took a certain pride in this criminal tradition. Never called the Mafia, organized crime in Chicago was generally referred to as the Syndicate or the Mob or the Outfit, and sometimes just the Boys. So big was the Syndicate presence in Chicago that at least one of the local television news channels kept a special correspondent, a man named John Drummond, to cover Mob news. Organized crime often led off a news broadcast or garnered a front-page headline, as when Allen Dorfman, an adviser to the Teamsters' Jimmy Hoffa and an all-around fixer, was gunned down in the parking lot of the Lincolnwood Hyatt. Mob figures—Tony "Big Tuna" Accardo, Sam Giancana, Joseph Lombardo—were celebrities, known throughout the city. A juicy bit of gossip was when Mob guys showed up to play golf at the Tam O'Shanter Country Club. Best, sound advice had it, to let them play through.

I myself, in the early 1970s, ran into a few of the Mob figures at the Riviera Club, where I sometimes played racquetball. Gus Alex, said to have been head of Mob gambling and prostitution in Chicago, was among them, and I remember locker-room discussions in which they expressed amazement at America's dithering in Vietnam. The strong should never take any crap from the weak; "blow the bastards to hell" was their view. The Mob influence reached all the way down to high schools, where football parlay cards—beat the spread on three college games and win \$6 on a \$1 bet—were always available. An Italian customer of my father's told him that if he ever had a cash-flow problem, the Boys were ready to help out.

Jews in the chiefly Italian Mob tended to play administrative roles. Jake "Greasy Thumb" Guzik, a Galician Jew, was the Syndicate's legal and financial adviser from the Capone days through the middle 1950s. Jewish bookies were not uncommon in Chicago. My mother's older brother, "Lefty Sam" Abrams, was one. He eventually owned a few points in the Riviera in Vegas. I may best establish my uncle's social standing by mentioning that Sinatra was at his granddaughter's wedding. After her brother's funeral, my mother, peering into his closet, counted 27 ultrasuede jackets.

In our neighborhood lived a man named Maury "Popsy" Pearl, a Jewish bookie whose bodyguard drove his son, a friend of my younger brother's, to school every day. A friend of mine's father, a borax man who had scored heavily in the aluminum-awning business, made the mistake of dabbling in boxers, which meant connecting to the Syndicate, which controlled the sport, with the result that one day he found himself pursued simultaneously by the FBI and a brute named "Milwaukee Phil" Alderisio. People in the Chicago of those days took a certain pride in their often tenuous connections to the Mob.

The Mob today seems to have retreated to the point of oblivion in Chicago. Prostitution and gambling, its two chief sources of income, have dried up. Gambling is now available on the Internet, and, with the advent of the pill and the sexual revolution, nice girls have all but put prostitutes out of business. The illicit big money these days is in drugs, and the trade is monopolized by drug lords working out of Latin America and the Chicago gangs who serve as their distributors. One is hard-pressed to name any prominent Mob members in current-day Chicago because, one gathers, there are none.

**B**y the time of my birth in Chicago in 1937, "the city of the big shoulders," in Carl Sandburg's phrase, had developed a considerable slouch. Not that there was ever much truth in Sandburg's sentimental poem of 1914, but in my boyhood there was at least still a Chicago stockyards, and on warm summer nights, with a wind blowing in from the south, even in my far north side neighborhood of Rogers Park one could smell the abattoir roughly a hundred blocks away. One of the standard grammar-school trips, one which I am not at all sorry somehow to have missed, was to the stockyards, where tons of dead animal flesh and entrails were on view and where large men stunned cows with sledgehammers before slaughtering them.

Chicago was nothing if not a reality instructor. Political idealism never really came alive in this city. By the 1930s, the Irish were in firm control of city hall, their machine nicely lubricated by patronage, corruption, and organized crime. Edward J. Kelly was mayor from 1933 to 1947; he was followed by Martin H. Kennelly and then the 21-year term of Richard J. Daley. With a brief pause for the negligible mayoralties of Michael Bilandic, Jane Byrne, and Harold Washington, Richard M. Daley (*le fils*, as he was never known), served as mayor of Chicago for 22 years, bringing us up to the less than impressive tenure of Rahm Emanuel.

My father, with more than a light touch of irony, used to say of Chicago aldermanic elections: "Strange, a man putting out a quarter of a million dollars to get a job that pays \$20,000 a year. It doesn't make sense." The only person who mattered politically in Chicago when I was a kid was your precinct captain; he might get you a parking permit or out of jury duty or some jerseys for your kid's baseball team. In Chicago, the game of politics was fixed, locked in. My mother, who was never guilty of reading a word about politics in the *Chicago Daily News* and later the *Sun-Times*—Colonel McCormick's isolationist *Tribune* was not allowed in our apartment—dispensed with my father's irony on the subject of Chicago politicians. Raising her coffee cup, little finger bent, she remarked: "They're all thieves, you know." No one so far has proven her wrong.

The Chicago of my boyhood was an intensely



Teenage gang members at a murder arraignment in Chicago, ca. 1957

Catholic city. Ask someone where he lived and he was likely to answer with the name of his parish (St. Nicholas of Tolentine, St. Gregory's). Catholic culture was everywhere in the country a hundred-fold stronger then than now, and the Catholic atmosphere was especially strong in Chicago owing to its large populations of Irish, Italians, and Poles. So Catholic did the place seem—with priests in cassock, nuns in habit everywhere part of the cityscape—that as a young boy I took Catholicism and Christianity to be coterminous. The Bing Crosby movies of those years—*Going My Way* (1944), *The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945)—reinforced this sense of Catholic omnipresence. A now-forgotten actor named Pat O'Brien made a living playing a priest in the movies. How many cinematic murderers he prayed for while accompanying them on their way to the gallows or electric chair would be difficult to calculate.

In the courtyard building on Sheridan Road to the north of ours lived the Cowling family. The father, Sam Cowling, did a regular comic bit called “Fiction and Fact from Sam's Almanac” on the then immensely popular national radio show called *Don McNeill's Breakfast Club*. Sam's beautiful wife was named Dale, the same name, older moviegoers will recall, as Roy Rogers's wife. Their boys, Sam Jr. (who was my age) and Billy, both went to St. Jerome's, thence to Loyola Academy, and thence to Jesuit Georgetown University, though they probably could have gotten into Harvard, Yale, or Princeton. Catholicism of their kind has vanished from American life.

Among Chicago's many sobriquets—Windy City, Second City, City on the Make, City That Works—the City of Neighborhoods had the highest truth quotient when I was

growing up. So geographically stratified by ethnicity and race was Chicago that a kid had only to tell where he lived than you knew his ethnic heritage, his family's income, and whether the family ate in the dining room or kitchen, his father in a collar or in his undershirt. Apart from going into the Loop to shop at Marshall Field's or Carson Pirie Scott or to Wrigley Field for a Cubs or Bears game, there was no reason to leave the friendly confines of one's neighborhood. The neighborhood contained everything—church or synagogue, schools public and parochial, shops, like-minded neighbors—one might possibly require. If our family hadn't had cousins living in the far south side neighborhood of Roseland, I might never have known Chicago had a south side until I was in my adolescence.

Ethnicity and race was the organizing principle behind Chicago neighborhoods. Greeks, Italians, Poles, Irish, Jews all wished to live among their own, and they did so. Our own neighborhood of West Rogers Park, to which we moved in 1947 from Rogers Park along Lake Michigan, was changing from white-collar gentile to ascending middle-class Jewish. My father bought a two-flat, and our renters, living on the second floor, were the Andersons, Mr. and Mrs. Anderson and Mrs. Anderson's unmarried sister, Edna, all then in their late 50s. Mr. Anderson worked at a nearby bank. Mrs. Anderson spent the day in housecoat and curlers, dressing shortly before her husband returned home. The only words of Mrs. Anderson's I can recall, and the family lived above us for more than a decade, are: “Mr. Anderson gets a nice lunch at the bank.” What they thought of us invading Jews I do not know. “There goes the neighborhood” would not be a wild guess.

West Rogers Park was roughly 30 percent Jewish when we moved in, but soon the balance shifted to well over 60 percent. Devon (pronounced Dih-vonne) Avenue, the main shopping hub in West Rogers Park, quickly became markedly Jewish in character. Within an area of eight-or-so blocks, there were three Jewish delis and three Chinese restaurants (one, the Pekin House, had an owner who over the years served so many Jews that he began to dress and look Jewish himself). The two men's stores—Turner Brothers and Aidem & Dess (the latter featuring color-coordinated window displays)—were Jewish-owned, and so was the high-line women's shop called Seymour Paisin, where shoppers were offered a cocktail while trying on clothes. Later a Jewish bakery and a shop selling K-rations (kreplach, knish, kugel, kasha) moved in. All very happy and *heimish*.

**O**ne of the marked changes in Chicago in recent decades has been in the character of its neighborhoods. West Rogers Park, for example, has become largely South Asian. Today on a Saturday night Devon Avenue resembles nothing so much as Mysore or some other provincial Indian city. Tamil is heard everywhere. Women walk about in saris, men in white cotton kurtas and trousers, young boys in cricket sweatshirts. Sikh turbans are not uncommon. Stores sell live chickens, also goat meat. Cell-phone shops have chargers available that work in electrical outlets on the other side of the world. Sari shops are abundant. Asian vegetables are on offer at the greengrocer's, and Indian restaurants predominate.

Along with the East Indians in current-day West Rogers Park live Haredi, or ultra-orthodox, Jews—chiefly farther west, past California Avenue. Ner Tamid, the conservative synagogue from which I was bar-mitzvahed in 1950, is out of business. West Devon is now rife with orthodox synagogues, Jewish day schools, and yeshivas. There are kosher butchers, religious bookstores, bakeries, and most of it closed on *Shabbos*.

Many of the old Chicago neighborhoods have undergone gentrification. A notable example on the north side has been Andersonville. A once rather drab neighborhood of working-class Swedes and Germans, it is known today as Mandersonville, home to older gays and lesbians—as opposed to the younger Boystown, the city's second gay neighborhood, farther south, around Belmont and Broadway, a place much more go-go. Years ago I wrote a short story in which a woman in the Andersonville restaurant

M. Henri remarks to her lunch companion that in the old days when Jews and blacks moved in people used to say, “There goes the neighborhood”; now, when gays move in, they say, “Here comes the neighborhood.” And so it has been with Andersonville, which is filled with pleasant restaurants and interesting shops, has a striking absence of people begging on its streets, very little crime, and modest houses and apartment buildings carefully kept up—a splendid instance of progress without disruption.

One sees this gentrification throughout the city in such neighborhoods as Ravenswood (where Rahm Emanuel lives), Roscoe Village, Lake View, Bucktown, Logan Square, Wicker Park. Entirely new neighborhoods have been created, too, such as South Loop and West Loop. South Loop in my youth was a skid row with a sprinkling of light industry. West Loop, another skid row, which back then had only dreary bars and no restaurants or nightlife of any sort, is now the center of *au courant* dining in Chicago. Both South and West Loop are now populated chiefly by the young. Much more than in the past, Chicago seems a city for the young, a place where to be in, say, one's early 30s seems ideal.

Hyde Park, the neighborhood of the University of Chicago, an enclave of intellectual life surrounded by black neighborhoods on three sides, remains much the same despite a rather energetic program of interventionist urban renewal in the 1950s and early '60s led by a man named Julian H. Levi, which left the neighborhood's main shopping streets bereft. Saul Bellow, a longtime resident of Hyde Park, once told me that they ought to erect a statue to Julian Levi for his urban renewal efforts—and then blow it up. In my student days at the university in the middle 1950s, Hyde Park was already a slightly dangerous neighborhood, and the Midway Plaisance, a strip of land between the south end of the campus and the black neighborhood of Woodlawn, was known as Apache territory.

The sweeping changes that have done most to alter the human topography of Chicago have been the decline of the city's heavy industry and the increase in its black and Hispanic populations. Chicago lost some 411,000 factory jobs between 1947 and 1982, or roughly 60 percent of its total. The stockyards closed, the steel mills followed, stores went under, real income went down. More and more whites moved out to the suburbs, and Chicago lost its place as the nation's second-largest city to Los Angeles. Chicago today is roughly one-third black, one-third Hispanic, and

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*A march down Michigan Avenue on December 31, 2016, each cross bearing the name of someone murdered in the city that year*

one-third white. The city's working-class character is gone.

Not surprisingly, blacks more than any other group were hurt by the reduction of factory jobs. The city's 26 black neighborhoods (defined by having a 75 percent or more black population) were further affected by the destruction, through urban renewal, of two mammoth public-housing complexes, the Robert Taylor Homes on the near south side and Cabrini-Green on the western edge of the near north side. This caused many already trouble-burdened black families—fatherless, unemployed, with delinquent kids—to move into already struggling black neighborhoods.

In my youth, blacks—Negroes as they then were—played scarcely any obvious, or perhaps I should say visible, role in Chicago. Then as now the city was highly segregated, with blacks living almost exclusively in the south side section of town known as Bronzeville. As a small boy, the only black person I came in contact with was the sweet-natured Emma, who came to clean our apartment on Tuesdays, and died there one day.

At six or seven years old, I made the mistake of reciting to my father the poem that begins “Eeny, meeny, miny, moe.” In a rare fit of fury, he gave me a strong lecture on the parallel pasts of persecution of blacks and Jews, and underscored how Jews were the last people who should be prejudiced against blacks. A man who backed up his sentiments with his actions, my father had a black secretary and blacks were predominant among the eight or ten people who made costume jewelry in his one-floor factory in a five-story

building on North Avenue. (The building is now the site of a glitzy gym in the youthful Wicker Park neighborhood.)

In that earlier day, whites could go into black neighborhoods much more easily—that is to say, more securely—than blacks could go into white ones. I was one of six adolescent Jewish boys who one night drove into the heart of Bronzeville to sample the bordello services of Iona Satterfield, the ex-wife of Bob Satterfield, the heavyweight whom I saw knocked out in the second round by Ezzard Charles in 1954 at Chicago Stadium. Larry Goldenberg parked his father's maroon and white Buick Roadmaster at the curb at 4246 South St. Lawrence in front of Iona's apartment without giving its or our safety a second thought.

Going into certain tough Italian or German neighborhoods was much more daunting. After a game against Waller High School, our mainly Jewish Senn High School basketball team was ambushed and beaten up by young Brando-ish thugs. Playing against Amundsen High School, we heard anti-Semitic chants coming from the stands.

**T**he Democratic machine remains in power in Chicago, though not so firmly or all-pervasively as in earlier decades. Some years ago, the political scientist Milton Rakove pointed out the non-ideological character of the machine in Chicago, which was chiefly interested in keeping its members in power, things under control, and the financial rewards of patronage rolling along. Keeping things under control, alas, has also meant keeping blacks

segregated, or so argues the historian Andrew J. Diamond in a recent book called *Chicago on the Make*.

Diamond's attack on the Daleys, *père et fils*, is that they didn't merely ignore black neighborhoods in Chicago but actively worked against their advance by keeping them strictly segregated. The Dan Ryan Expressway, he holds, was built to slow black incursion into the white neighborhoods of the southwest side. The campus of the University of Illinois at Chicago was placed where it was, on the southwestern edge of the Loop instead of in Humboldt Park where it might have uplifted the Puerto Rican neighborhood, to keep west side blacks from moving closer into the Loop. The Daleys did this, Diamond argues, through strategically planned urban-renewal projects, through capturing anti-poverty funds from federal programs and putting them to their own uses, and through their extensive efforts to build up the Loop, encourage tourism, and protect the city's wealthier neighborhoods: Streeterville, Lincoln Park, Lake Shore Drive. The result was blacks segregated in hyperghettos and the hegemony of what Diamond calls "neoliberalism." Neoliberalism, the great villain of *Chicago on the Make*, is defined by a Berkeley political scientist named Wendy Brown as "a rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life"—or, in other words, as putting monied interests before human ones.

The deterioration of most black neighborhoods in Chicago is not up for argument. Ridden with crime, without amenities, lacking even necessities (many are "food deserts," a term denoting the absence of supermarkets or even convenience stores in some of them), the general desolation of these neighborhoods is such that, Diamond reports, "the Mexican aversion to settling in and around black neighborhoods—an aversion shared by Chicago's next largest Latino group, Puerto Ricans—was so strong that by 2000 Chicago displayed the highest degree of segregation between blacks and Latinos among the hundred largest cities in the United States." The black west side, long ago the home of much of the city's Jewish population before its migration to the north side and thence to the plush suburbs of the North Shore, saw 28 blocks all but destroyed by fire after the black riots following the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. These blocks have never been rebuilt.

If blacks once seemed all but invisible in my Chicago, today they are ubiquitous. Turn on the local news, a depressing experience in itself, and all too many nights one will be greeted by the sight of a black woman weeping

because of the death by shooting of a son, or grandson, in a gang killing, or of a young daughter having been hit by a stray bullet. A picture of the dead boy or girl, often in high-school graduation cap and gown, will appear, and an uncle or aunt or older sibling comes on to attest to the sweetness and promise of the deceased. The killers are seldom apprehended, for the understandable reason that neighborhood residents are terrified of retaliation if they turn them in. Then there are the news items about carjackings, muggings on the El for cell phones, stolen cars crashed into Michigan Avenue shops in jewelry robberies, and groups of black youth storming into the Gap and other such shops to grab jeans or other items.

Diamond lays the blame for the hell that most of Chicago's black neighborhoods have recently become on

Richard M. Daley. While mayor, Diamond argues, Daley's "public relations team made sure to use every gang incident to claim that gangs rather than the mayor's policies were to blame for the two main problems African Americans had been complaining about for years: defective schools and brutal cops." Chicago police animosity toward blacks, which included "Red Squads" used to disrupt earnest efforts at community organization, supplies a leitmotif in *Chicago on the Make*.

The author also characterizes the large number of blacks and Latinos appointed to Richard M. Daley's cabinet as, using Michael Katz's phrase, "the management of marginalization." Diamond is no easier on Rahm Emanuel, Daley's successor, calling him "Mayor 1%."

A month or so ago, after a particularly brutal weekend of gang killings in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood, I heard a black man, an angry resident of the neighborhood, shout at a television reporter, "They better get some programs down here fast." What "programs," I wondered, did he suppose would seriously help? In *Great American City* (2012), a book about contemporary Chicago, Robert J. Sampson made the argument, based on a vast arsenal of social-science research, that troubled neighborhoods have their greatest chance of maintaining order through community organization. Sampson argues, in the less-than-convincing language of contemporary social science, which always seems to set reality off at a comfortable distance, that "whether through the enhancement of age-graded mentorship and monitoring of adolescent activities as a form of collective efficacy, increasing organizational opportunity for citizen participation in decision making, or enhancing

**Turn on the local news, and all too many nights one will be greeted by the sight of a woman weeping because of the death by shooting of a son, or grandson, in a gang killing, or of a young daughter having been hit by a stray bullet.**

the legitimacy of government institutions that have eroded trust among those served, we need a surgical-like attention to repairing or renewing existing structures rather than simply designing escape routes.”

To have organization one needs leadership, and part of the problem in Chicago is that black leadership has been—I can think of no more kindly word for it—dismal. Most black politicians and clergy appear to have been in business for themselves. Beginning with William Dawson, a black alderman who sold himself to the Richard J. Daley machine, through the never-camera-shy Jesse Jackson and the disappointing Senator Carol Moseley Braun to the Black Panther-turned-congressman Bobby Rush, no one has emerged to organize and lead Chicago’s black population out of the wilderness of their increasingly crime-infested neighborhoods, where drug trafficking, high unemployment, and disproportionate poverty rates reign and seem unlikely soon to decline.

The recent black protest movements seem irrelevant in the face of such misery. Even Diamond is dubious about the efficacy of the Black Lives Matter movement to accomplish more than traffic jams and attracting television cameras. He mentions that a Pew Trust study found “only 15 percent of Hispanics and 14 percent of whites claimed to strongly support” the Black Lives Matter movement. In 2016 and 2017, of the nearly 1,500 killings in Chicago, 22 involved the police, the target of Black Lives Matter. Not many people, and no putative black leaders, meanwhile, have stood up to ask why, if black lives truly matter, black-on-black gang murders have been allowed to arrive at the horrendous level they have.

**E**arly in *Chicago on the Make*, Andrew Diamond refers to the “culturization of politics,” which he describes as “the transfer of political acts and events onto the terrain of culture, where they become disassociated from questions of structure, power, and, ultimately, political mobilization.” On the penultimate page of his book, he again notes that many whites are “still invested in cultural explanations of poverty in the other [that is, black] Chicago.” The cultural, as opposed to the political, argument holds that while admitting the toll of racial discrimination in the past, something has meanwhile gone deeply wrong with urban black culture.

The argument is scarcely news. As long ago as 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan published his “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” which when it first appeared was greeted with derision by nearly everyone, black and white, on the left. In his report, Moynihan argued that the gap between black and other groups was widening owing chiefly to the breakdown of the black nuclear family. Too few black fathers were on the scene and this, even

more than continued discrimination by race, was responsible for the wretched conditions in which too many blacks in America found themselves. In a crucial, and much excoriated, sentence, Moynihan wrote: “The steady expansion of welfare programs can be taken as a measure of the steady disintegration of the Negro family structure over the past generation in the United States.”

Whatever the flaws in the cultural argument—and not least among them is the fear that it can lapse into racism with its implication that black culture (and hence blacks themselves) is inherently inferior—few people are likely to note any valuable advances in that culture over the past 60 years. Compare Nat Cole to Jay-Z, Duke Ellington to Chance the Rapper, or the brilliant essays of the young James Baldwin to the racial tirades of Ta-Nehisi Coates and the sense of the regress of black culture—from one of elegance and pride to soaking in victimization—is staggering, saddening, depressing in the extreme.

Meanwhile, political correctness makes any meaningful criticism of the new black culture from outside all but impossible, if only by keeping the country’s best minds from addressing the subject. Toward the close of his career George Kennan thought about turning his interests from foreign policy to domestic problems but found himself unable to do so, he noted in his *Diaries* in 1975, “when one of the greatest of the problems is the deterioration of life in the great cities and when one of the major components of the problem this presents is the Negro problem, which is taboo.” Those black writers—Shelby Steele, Thomas Sowell, William Julius Wilson—who think outside the victimhood box are repudiated for doing so.

Every newly arrived immigrant group has in darker moments thought itself, however briefly, victimized, but by now too many American blacks have so clung to the notion that victimhood itself has become the center of their sense of themselves and has all but usurped any other identity. They have been encouraged in this victimhood script for decades and decades, first by liberals and now by progressives, to the point where it could be argued that the left generally has contributed as heavily to the condition of contemporary blacks as lingering racism. In fact, encouragement in the belief that all black problems are at root owing to racism is certain to keep blacks in their place, and might itself just be the ultimate racism.

Chicago is today two cities, one gentrified and grand, the other devastated and despairing, both within a single municipal boundary. The situation is intolerable. Something has got to be done, and, complex, difficult, and arduous as the task is, if it is one day to get done, however great the goodwill of many whites in the city, the black population of Chicago will, like every racial and ethnic group before it, have to do it pretty much on its own. ♦

# The Mystery Martyr

*Who was Hezbollah's Samer Atoui, and why was he mourned by admirers around the world?*

BY EMANUELE OTTOLENGHI

*Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este, Tri-Border Area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay*

**D**eath came suddenly for Samer Ibrahim Atoui, a 48-year-old native of the southern Lebanese village of Khiyam. On October 2, 2017, a Syrian opposition social media account posted photographs showing the burned-out wreckage of Atoui's car, alongside Atoui's picture and that of his fellow traveler, a known Hezbollah special force commander named Ali Al-Ashiq. Atoui was initially identified only as Abu Ali Jawad, his nom de guerre. The apparent cause of death was a drone strike.

Atoui's demise might have been unremarkable, given the heavy fighting and mounting Hezbollah casualties in Syria. But this death opened up surprising windows into the powerful ties between Hezbollah's leadership in Lebanon and the criminal enterprises in South America that generate hundreds of millions of dollars for the group each year. These networks, fed by drug money and other illicit traffic, inhabit the still-underexplored intersections between narcotrafficking and terror finance. Swashbuckling gangsters, Bond-movie villains, white-collar criminals, and Lebanese merchants, whose economic success serves Hezbollah, man them across the globe. Their proceeds fund war and ethnic cleansing in Syria and Hezbollah's rearmament in South Lebanon. Their trade feeds violence and crime, flooding advanced economies with counterfeited medicines, illicit drugs, weapons, and dirty cash.

The toxic convergence between terrorism and narcotrafficking suddenly came into focus in Washington when, late last year, a *Politico* report dropped a political bombshell by charging that the Obama administration put "an increasingly insurmountable series of roadblocks" before investigators from a task force named Project Cassandra. This was an ambitious effort by the Drug Enforcement Agency to combat Hezbollah drug-trafficking from Latin America into the United States and Europe. In the

wake of the *Politico* investigation, Attorney General Jeff Sessions last month ordered a review of decisions made by the Obama Department of Justice and established an interagency task force entrusted with combating Hezbollah's terror finance.

That Hezbollah has in the last decade morphed into a global criminal enterprise is part of the reason it is today Lebanon's power-behind-the-throne. Iran founded the Lebanese Shia militia to spread its Khomeinist ideology at the height of Lebanon's civil war. It is Tehran's most successful franchise and can largely sustain itself financially even as it expands its reach. It is spearheading the ayatollahs' military effort to save the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad. It is fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with Iran's Revolutionary Guards and their Afghan, Pakistani, and Iraqi proxies in Syria. It is helping the Islamic Republic establish, train, and mobilize likeminded militias in Iraq, Yemen, and elsewhere. Hezbollah is creating a new generation of well-trained and battle-hardened Shia fighters whose goal, beyond Syria, is to make Khomeinism triumphant across the region. Their enemies are the same as always—the Sunni monarchies and the hated Zionists, with America, the imperial power with its toxic, godless culture, lurking in the background. Hezbollah's resilience and accomplishments set it apart from other Islamist movements. It believes, and it has reason to believe, that it can succeed in its vision. As journalist Thanassis Cambanis wrote in his study of Hezbollah, *A Privilege to Die*, "Hezbollah has inculcated millions . . . into its ideology of Islamic Resistance. The credo is catchy and thoroughly thought out; and it is coupled to an unusually effective program of militancy and mobilization. That recipe has put Hezbollah in the pilot's seat in the Middle East, steering the region into a thicket of wars to come." Those wars keep coming thanks to men like Atoui and their devotion to Hezbollah's cause.

**T**he first crucial detail that Hezbollah released about Atoui was his name. The opposition's Twitter post noted the circumstances of his death but only used his nom de guerre; Hezbollah's Twitter announcement revealed his real name, identifying him

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as Abu Ali Jawad and Samer Atoui. The latter post also included two photos of his face, one smiling with sunglasses, the other with slightly parted lips and a plaintive gaze. These details were the key that unlocked his presence on social media to outside observers.

On the day of Atoui's death, residents of Khiyam started posting on their Facebook accounts videos of a procession of cars accompanying an ambulance to the entrance of town. To the sound of gunfire, a coffin emerged from the ambulance, draped in the yellow Hezbollah flag. Men in black escorted the coffin, surrounded by a crowd of mourners gathered to see a son of their village take his final journey.

In Khiyam, everyone seems to have known of Atoui's prominent role inside Hezbollah. Yet to his dying day, few in the West ever heard of him. Little of his role in Hezbollah emerges from Atoui's social media profiles, much less from the flowery pronouncements Hezbollah made to honor his death. It is doubtful anyone would have identified him as a senior Hezbollah figure had it not been for the matching information released on Twitter in the hours after his death.

Atoui cultivated the unassuming public image of a man focused on the joys of family and a simple rural life. His Facebook account's photos show a jovial-looking man, tall and handsome, slightly graying, but still in the prime of his life. Whether playing grandfather to a joyful newborn baby, out on a fishing expedition with friends, or skillfully riding a horse, Atoui only immortalized intimately personal moments on his social media. He occasionally appears in military fatigues, but the bonhomie exuded by his smiling face makes it hard to tell whether he is hunting Syrian rebels or pheasants. In his last year, Atoui even posted numerous photos of a rundown building that he eventually turned into a refurbished family home with a pool—hardly a give-away of his professional militancy.

Had Atoui lived anywhere else in the world but South Lebanon, he could have easily been mistaken for a typical family man intent on building his middle-class suburban dream. To the best of our knowledge, he was a happy man, devoted to his family, admired by his peers, and loved by his friends. He was also a senior Hezbollah commander who met his untimely death on the front lines of the war between the Assad regime and the Islamic State.

On the day of Atoui's death, an unidentified drone reportedly struck Hezbollah positions in the desert of eastern Syria, killing several of its fighters. Lebanese media accused the United States of ordering the strike, eliciting a strong denial from the Pentagon. There were suggestions of friendly fire, since Russia and Iran are the only other forces operating drones in the area. Casualties, quickly announced on Hezbollah-affiliated social media, included the two senior Hezbollah commanders, Ali Al-Ashiq and

Samer Atoui. Even more puzzling: Their car appeared to have been struck by either a missile or a roadside bomb a few miles from the site where the other seven fighters were hit by the reported drone strike.

Though these were two separate incidents, Hezbollah information outlets treated them as one, eulogizing its nine martyrs together. To date, Hezbollah media and social platforms have not revealed much about Atoui's rank and role inside the resistance. Yet the elaborate production immediately assembled to honor his memory made it clear that he was not a regular casualty. Though the circumstances of Atoui's death may still be shrouded in mystery, the way in which his name emerged from the shadows reveals much about Hezbollah's global footprint.



*Friends in high places: the late Samer Atoui (left) with Mohammad Reza Naqdi, former head of Iran's IRGC Basij militia*

A hint that Atoui was a very senior Hezbollah operative, not just a local commander, came from a notice posted the day after his death on the Facebook account of a member of the Shia Lebanese community in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil. The ad summoned members of the community to commemorate Atoui and another slain young Hezbollah soldier, Ibrahim Ma'an Sbeyti, on October 6 at the local Imam Khomeini mosque. Foz do Iguaçu lies at the confluence of the Paraná and Iguaçu rivers, which mark the frontier area where Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay meet. Better known as *la triple frontera*, Spanish for the tri-border area, or TBA, it is a notoriously porous border for all sorts of illicit traffic. It is also the home of a large community of Shia Lebanese merchants, who began settling there in the 1950s. Back then, the TBA was little more than an outpost in the middle of the jungle, but the building of the Friendship Bridge connecting Paraguay and Brazil in 1965 and the opening, in 1984, of the Itaipu Dam, a large hydroelectric project just north of Foz do Iguaçu, boosted the area's economy. Paraguay's late dictator Alfredo Stroessner encouraged the Lebanese to immigrate to Ciudad Presidente Stroessner (later renamed Ciudad del Este) and turn it into a bustling commercial center.

They did. Ciudad del Este's tax-free commercial zone begins just past the Friendship Bridge. It is a maze of stores, market stalls, and elegant malls offering a mixture of duty-free-shop-priced products, unregulated currency exchange services, cheap Chinese-made consumer goods, and a suspiciously overabundant and underpriced selection of Western brands. Many of these products are routinely smuggled across the river to Brazil, where the brands, both in their counterfeit and genuine incarnations, are sold at a premium. The Lebanese community is still predominant among shop owners, though in recent years Chinese merchants have joined them in growing numbers.

Ciudad del Este has been a good investment for them. Many live in opulent homes north of the city in the exclusive and secluded Paraná Country Club. Some have acquired prized honorary consulships. The most successful are regularly seen in local glamour magazines rubbing shoulders with the country's elites.

Their story of success is not dissimilar to those of other communities of Lebanese expatriates across the region. Much like Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina are home to large Arab diasporas. In other parts of the world, their members have by and large assimilated into local cultures; the TBA Shia, by contrast, have remained close to their South Lebanon ancestral home, which since the 1980s has been increasingly dominated by two political and paramilitary groups: Amal and Hezbollah. Both TBA Shia mosques are affiliated with Hezbollah. The Shia school on the Brazilian side is run by Hezbollah's al-Mahdi educational movement, while Amal is responsible for the school on the Paraguayan side. Their clerics and teachers are also closely linked to Hezbollah.

The TBA links to Hezbollah are not just financial. When Iran ordered the bombing of Israel's embassy in Buenos Aires in 1992 and then, two years later, against the AMIA building, the Jewish cultural center in the same city, Hezbollah operatives in the TBA provided critical logistical support. When years later one, Ali Khalil Merhi, was arrested, he was found hiding in Ciudad del Este. When Moussa Ali Hamdan, indicted in 2009 by the United States for providing material support to Hezbollah through the sale of counterfeited currency and passports, was captured in 2010, he was found in the same building as Merhi's hideout.

Despite these strong links, commemorations of Hezbollah's fallen are infrequent though not rare among the

Lebanese Shia diaspora. They usually occur when the fallen have relatives in the community, which Atoui did in the Brás neighborhood of São Paulo, Brazil. The Brás mosque's announcement named the martyr and his relations, a paternal uncle. Yet Atoui does not appear to have family in Foz do Iguaçu. There are numerous Sbeytis and some Atouis in the tri-border area, but no mention was publicly made of them, and the deceased's social media accounts do not appear to link directly to any of them.

**S**amer Atoui's case was unusual, then—his death was greeted by a tremendous outpouring of grief beyond family circles, especially in the TBA, where Hezbollah's presence is closely tied to the drug trade and other illicit activities. His funeral, broadcast live on Facebook, elicited tearful comments from numerous Shia communities overseas. Viewers sending blessings for the soul of the departed included numerous Canadian-based members of Atoui's family, villagers from Khiyam, and many others in Lebanon, in addition to people from as far afield as Kuwait, the Ivory Coast, Uppsala, Sweden, and, of course, Latin America. The videos were shared hundreds of times by people as far as Sydney, Australia. Someone both beloved and famous had died. His admirers close and far were paying their last tribute.

Within days of Atoui's death, videos, photos, memorial services, eulogies, and articles emerged to provide a full account of how important Atoui was to Hezbollah. His funeral procession summoned Hezbollah VIPs from all departments of the organization, including senior members responsible for illicit financial activities overseas. Among them: Hezbollah member of Lebanon's parliament Ali Fayyad, who represents Atoui's district; Hezbollah's commander of the Khiyam sector, Hajj Ali Hassan Zureiq, whom the U.S. Department of Treasury identified, in 2010, as the director of the Lebanon branch of the U.S.-sanctioned Imam Khomeini Relief Committee; Hezbollah's commander of the first southern region, in which Atoui was a leader, Seyed Ahmad Safieddine; and Akram Barakat, the deputy head of Hezbollah's executive council.

Immediately after the funeral, Atoui was eulogized by the local mufti of Khiyam and Marjayoun, Abdel Hussein El Abdallah, but a few days later, no less than Qassem Naim, the deputy secretary general of Hezbollah, second only to Hassan Nasrallah, came to Khiyam to memorialize Atoui.



*The Friendship Bridge that connects Brazil and Paraguay and boosted both economies, seen from above on November 16, 2017*

A picture of Atoui posing next to the former commander of Irani's Basij militia, Mohammad Reza Naqdi, emerged. This was no ordinary martyr. And to one Hezbollah operative based in Latin America, Atoui was first and foremost a personal friend.

Sobhi Mahmoud Fayad is a TBA-based Hezbollah senior member whom the U.S. Department of Treasury sanctioned in 2006 for his role as "a senior TBA Hezbollah official who served as a liaison between the Iranian embassy and the Hezbollah community in the TBA" under Executive Order 13224, which targets global terrorism's financial enablers. Treasury accused Fayad of being active in drug trafficking and currency counterfeiting. The day Atoui died, Fayad changed his Facebook profile photo to capture for posterity his friendship with Atoui. The two are pictured lounging in a garden with a third friend—the TBA-based Bassam Nader, whose Facebook handle is the Farsi equivalent of "death to America." This was not a photo op, but a genuinely intimate moment among close friends.

Such friendships have implications for U.S. national security. Fayad is the brother of Ali Fayyad, the Hezbollah MP who attended Atoui's funeral procession. More important, according to his 2006 Treasury designation, Fayad is a close associate of members of the Barakat clan, whom Hezbollah dispatched to the TBA to build a funding network to support the organization's activities. These Barakats are close relatives of Akram Barakat, a member of Hezbollah's executive council and the second in command at Hezbollah's global finance department. (Barakat also accompanied Atoui to his final resting place). At 71, Sobhi Fayad is one of the elders of the TBA Hezbollah network. Unimpeded by U.S. sanctions, he has continued to travel around the globe in recent years, making regular visits to Lebanon at least annually, including last October, when Atoui died.

Fayad and Nader are not the only ones in the Latin American Hezbollah network who appear to have personally known Atoui. Numerous others from the TBA, and linked communities in the Brazilian frontier town of Ponta Porã, from São Paulo, and from the Paraguayan capital of Asunción, took time to join in the Facebook chatter triggered by the announcement of Atoui's death.

Much still needs to be clarified about Atoui's rank and role inside Hezbollah and the extent of his connections

to the TBA, including whether he was a member of Hezbollah's External Security Organization Business Affairs Component (BAC), which according to the DEA is in charge of running drug trafficking and the laundering of drug proceeds.

It is definitely possible that Atoui was part of the BAC. As shown in his entry in Paraguay's national registry, Atoui was given permanent residency in Paraguay, a world away from Khiyam, in 1993. At the time Khiyam was under Israeli occupation. Whatever his later claims to Hezbollah fame, in 1993 he cannot have been much more than a lowly fighter, promising though he might have been, with familial connections to guide his path in the great expanses of Latin America. Fayad, on the other hand, was by the mid-1990s a well-established TBA-based operative working for the Barakat clan.

Hezbollah's martyr's posters and videos show photos of a young Atoui in uniform. One can speculate at what stage in life he moved to the TBA and why, but clearly he wore Hezbollah's uniform at a time when it was fighting Israel in South Lebanon and then, as a young man, he went to Latin America.

He was in Latin America for years and they must have been some of the best of his life. A year before

he met his fate, Atoui waxed lyrical about how nicely Lebanese immigrants were treated in Brazil. Clearly, Brazil held a special place in his heart. Five years after he obtained his permanent residency, and likely his citizenship, in Paraguay, in 1998 Atoui became a naturalized Brazilian—a sign that he lived there for a period.

Holding both passports is common among Shia Lebanese operating in the TBA. Evidence has recently emerged that Hezbollah operatives moving there rely on TBA-based Lebanese intermediaries who facilitate their immigration paperwork. Terror finance operatives in the BAC routinely seek multiple citizenships to move more easily across borders.

So here's what we know: Atoui was a veteran of Hezbollah's wars. He spent at least five years in Paraguay and Brazil—likely in the TBA—and at one point, according to information available in Paraguay's commercial registry, he had a business there, although he later shuttered it. He was a close friend of a U.S.-sanctioned Hezbollah operative 23 years his senior, possibly a family relation but likelier a mentor in the trade Atoui went to learn in the TBA.



*The wreckage in which Hezbollah operatives Samer Atoui and Ali Al-Ashiq met their deaths*

It could be that Sobhi Fayad and Samer Atoui were not just friends but colleagues. There was, after all, a significant age gap between them. Atoui, who came to the TBA in the early 1990s and spent enough time in the area to acquire two citizenships, may have met Fayad in Latin America rather than in Lebanon. Fayad, who back then was in his forties and ran a racketeering operation on Hezbollah's behalf in the TBA, could have taken this young veteran of Hezbollah's battles under his wings and trained him in the ways of illicit finance. It is just a theory, of course, but Atoui's publicly available information checks out.



*Blood brothers: After Samer Atoui (left) died, Hezbollah official Sobhi Mahmoud Fayad (center) made this his Facebook profile picture. At right is Bassam Nader, whose Facebook handle is 'Death to America' in Farsi.*

Atoui left Latin America at some point, and upon return to Lebanon he became a heavyweight inside Hezbollah. According to a local source, he had not visited for more than a decade by the time he died. Yet the outpouring of genuine, intimate grief suggested many knew him and interacted with him personally long after he was supposedly gone.

These facts expose the limits of American efforts to restrict Hezbollah's access to financing, especially illicit access. Despite being listed as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist, Fayad's frequent travels to Lebanon reveal that neither travel bans nor asset freezes are actually being implemented against him. To reach Lebanon, Fayad crossed at least two borders and transited several international airports. No one stopped him.

Countries like Brazil and Paraguay, which host Fayad and have granted him citizenship, do not seem interested in acting on U.S. terror finance designations. The State Department's 2016 report on terrorism noted that "there were no terrorist financing convictions or actions to freeze in 2016" in Paraguay, despite the existence of legal means and capacity to enforce them against Hezbollah operatives. Speaking to the author, a senior Paraguayan official countered that the government of Paraguay could only act on U.S. designations if it received an official request from Washington.

The lack of interest in enforcement is aggravated by the

unusually low threshold for acquiring citizenship in both countries. The same State Department report observed that in Brazil, "Irregular migration, especially by aliens from areas with a potential nexus to terrorism, is a growing problem, with Brazil often serving as a transit country." Citizens of Latin America still require a valid visa to enter the United States—Hezbollah operatives with Brazilian passports are not necessarily more dangerous to the homeland. But having multiple passports facilitates the efforts of these operatives to seamlessly move across borders in pursuit of their goals. And their unfettered presence, as citizens, in countries with weak law enforcement, corrupt political elites, and rampant organized crime means their ability to conduct business and raise money for their cause is enhanced.

Now that the Trump administration has turned toward a harder line on Iran and its proxies, it is possible that the State Department will exert greater pressure on South American governments. Given his rank, Atoui's case may prove to be particularly embarrassing for both Asunción and Brasilia. Yet this is not just a one-off case of benign neglect.

**R**ecent Hezbollah terrorist plots—successful and thwarted—all involved operatives with multiple passports. In July 2012, Hezbollah operatives successfully targeted a bus carrying Israeli tourists at an airport outside the Bulgarian seaside resort of Burgas, murdering five Israelis and the Bulgarian bus driver. The three terrorists were Meliad Farah, Hassan el-Haji Hassan, and Mohamad Hassan El-Husseini, dual nationals of Lebanon and, respectively, Australia, Canada, and France. A few days before the Burgas attack, Cypriot authorities arrested Hossam Yaacoub, a dual national of Lebanon and Sweden who was plotting to strike Israeli tourists in Cyprus. Several weeks later, an Iranian-Canadian dual national was arrested in Bulgaria while she was scouting a Chabad center for another possible terror attack. Another dual national of Lebanon and Canada, Hossein Bassam Abdallah, was arrested in Cyprus and sentenced to six years in prison in 2015 for plotting terror attacks against Israeli targets. He was found in possession of vast quantities of explosives when arrested.

This pattern applies to Latin America too. When Peruvian authorities arrested Lebanese national Mohammad Amadar in Lima in October 2014, they found explosive devices in his apartment. His phone included evidence of scouting potential targets. Amadar, like other members of Hezbollah's overseas operations, held a second passport, in his case from Sierra Leone, which he used to enter the country. Although Peruvian courts have so far only convicted him of immigration fraud, the U.S. Department of Treasury listed Amadar as a member of

Hezbollah's External Operation Service (of which the BAC is part) in 2016 and slapped sanctions on him.

Those who visit the TBA know very well that the Paraguay-Brazil boundary is largely fictional. Of the numerous individuals whose business activities the United States targeted with terror finance designations in 2004 and 2006, most have residences on both sides of the border, hold both citizenships, bank in both countries, and play each jurisdiction's weaknesses to their own advantage.

Unlike the United States, neither Brazil nor Paraguay has designated Hezbollah a terrorist organization, although both have antiterrorist legislation in place which would allow them to do so. If Asunción and Brasília chose to designate Hezbollah, they could revoke citizenships, seize assets, and preemptively detain the group's operatives. The United States would not be the only beneficiary of such moves, since Hezbollah operatives were arrested in 2014 and 2017 for scouting high-value targets in Latin America. Clearly the region remains vulnerable to attacks, despite a long period of quiet since the 1994 bombing of the AMIA building in Buenos Aires, which bore Hezbollah's fingerprints. The AMIA bombing is still awaiting justice for its victims, including the slain prosecutor, Alberto Nisman, who more than anyone else worked to expose the Iranian-Hezbollah matrix of the attack. Yet not even Buenos Aires has designated Hezbollah a terror entity.

While encouraging greater vigilance from its South American partners, the United States cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the shortcomings of its own enforcement efforts. A case in point is that of Ali Issa Chamas, a recently sentenced Lebanese trafficker with ties to Hezbollah who was extradited to Miami from the TBA in June 2017. Publicly available documents show that Chamas had business ties to the United States and was getting ready to export significant quantities of cocaine for the American market. Even more concerning: In his conversations with a U.S.-based client, Chamas bragged about having a secure method for shipping cocaine by air cargo from the TBA into the United States. Clearly, Hezbollah operatives have a way to get their deadly merchandise through the front door, if they can get drugs past U.S. airport authorities.

There aren't many cargo flights connecting the TBA to the United States. Most are operated either by a Miami- or a Persian Gulf-based carrier on a regular basis. The challenge here is not one of catching small planes flying out of Latin American jungles or speed boats crisscrossing the Caribbean. As such, U.S. airport authorities, customs officials, and other law enforcement agencies can mitigate this vulnerability by systematically searching planes coming into the United States from the TBA, as well as working with the airlines involved to improve their own cargo controls. (Likewise, the State Department may want to raise

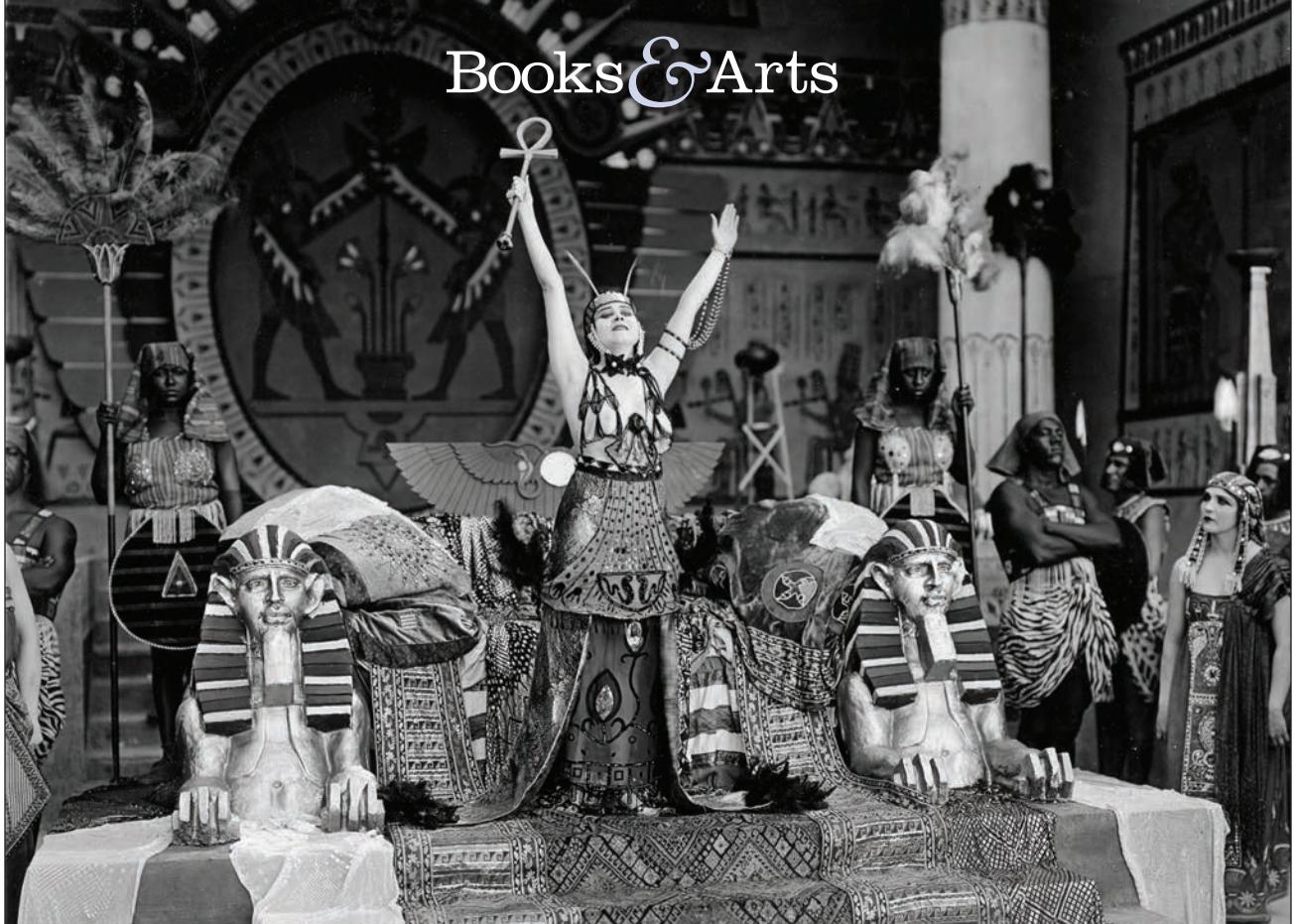
the issue with Paraguayan authorities, who can conduct more rigorous inspections on their end.)

U.S. authorities can also investigate hundreds of front companies that suspect TBA businesses have established in southern Florida. This process is likely to move more quickly once the White House finally appoints a new DEA administrator, to empower the law enforcement agency most actively involved in the fight against Hezbollah's drug trafficking and money laundering rings in recent years.

As part of its efforts to target global terror finance, over a decade ago, the Bush administration went after Hezbollah's operatives in Latin America, designating a major network implicated in money laundering, counterfeiting, and drug trafficking in the TBA. In parallel, the DEA launched the aforementioned Project Cassandra to systematically dismantle Hezbollah drug trafficking networks across the globe, many of which emanated from Latin America. Project Cassandra initially scored some important victories but its success was short-lived. If sustained, over time the combined onslaught of sanctions and law enforcement actions could have disrupted Hezbollah's overseas financial flows. Instead, with the Obama administration aggressively pursuing a nuclear deal with Iran, many investigations were downgraded, slowed down, put on ice, or simply nixed so as not to upset the Iranians. The complacency of local authorities who failed to follow through on U.S. sanctions did the rest.

We may never know whether Atoui was a senior operative for Hezbollah's overseas illicit operations. But the echo of his death put the spotlight on a remote area of Latin America that still plays, thanks to its porous border and illicit trades, a key role in Hezbollah's finances. On a rainy November morning when I last visited, there was little sign of movement in front of the Foz do Iguaçu Imam Khomeini mosque where congregants had gathered to commemorate Atoui. It was Friday, a holy day of prayers. Yet the faithful were on the other side of the river, in Paraguay, readying their stores for the weekend onslaught of buyers. Business is booming, with the latest rage, satellite decoders, selling at every electronics store in the city. On the Paraguay side, there are even billboards advertising \$130 decoders that will let anyone with a fast Internet connection watch Netflix and HBO without paying a subscription.

Inside an electronics shop, a Paraguayan salesman boasts that the product he is trying to sell me is the best one on the market. He also swears he has the best price in the city. Neither the salesman nor his Lebanese boss sitting watchfully in the back of the store appears overtly preoccupied with the legality of the product and the loss of revenue inflicted on cable and satellite providers across the border. "Will it work in the U.S.?" I ask him. He points to a screen broadcasting a sports event on ESPN and smiles. ♦



Theda Bara (nicknamed 'The Vamp'), one of Fox's biggest stars, in a lavish 1917 production of Cleopatra. No known copy of the film survives.

# The Man Who Lost the Movies

*William Fox was a motion-picture pioneer.  
Why is he all but unknown today?* **BY CARL ROLLYSON**

In 1960, already a movie buff, educated by Bill Kennedy, the ex-film-actor host of CKLW's programs featuring old Hollywood classics, I took the bus from my east-side Detroit home to the Fox Theatre downtown. I vividly remember watching Victor Mature, all muscles, and Hedy Lamarr, all allure, in Cecil B. DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* (1949).

Carl Rollyson is the editor of the Hollywood Legends biography series from the University Press of Mississippi and the author of *Marilyn Monroe: A Life of the Actress*.

## The Man Who Made the Movies

*The Meteoric Rise and Tragic Fall of William Fox*  
by Vanda Krefft  
Harper, 927 pp., \$40

Going to the Fox was a special event no matter what was shown. It had some 5,000 seats, and its grandeur had not significantly diminished since it opened in 1928 as the flagship theater in the Fox chain. I entered through one of 16 doors leading into the lobby, walked on marble floors, looked up at ornate ceilings and

scagliola columns with Corinthian capitals and beams with griffins, cartouches, and starbursts; then I'd ascend a stately staircase to the mezzanine level, where I sat watching a movie bigger than life itself.

I liked to look over the orchestra below and then sit back with the opulent feeling of being entertained. I might as well have been in ancient Rome—although Rome itself would not have satisfied my 12-year-old's Foxite craving for the grandiosity of the wide screen. It never occurred to me that Fox was the name of a man

who invented the experience I could not live without or that it nearly killed him when the moment of doom descended with the realization that he would lose everything he had put into making my day.

Not yet a year old, William Fox (1879-1952), born Wilhelm Fuchs, came with his mother to the United States four months after his father Michael, a Hungarian Jew, landed at Castle Garden in the port of New York and immediately Americanized the family's last name. William Fox, with no memory of his native land, never dreamed of living anywhere except America, even though his feckless father often denigrated the United States and extolled the village life he had left behind. Michael, a poor provider, essentially turned over family responsibilities to young William, who never shirked his obligations and never forgave his father's derelictions. Years later, at the height of his Hollywood reign, William Fox sent a camera crew to Hungary to film the grim conditions of village life. He showed the footage to his father and family; Michael Fox never spoke of heavenly Hungary again. At his funeral, his multimillionaire 57-year-old son spit on his casket and said, "You son of a bitch."

"In many ways, the father's failures were father to the man," writes Vanda Krefft in her monumental new biography. It is a fitting beginning for the story of a self-made American who believed in his own genius and took to heart his mother's exhortation to push forward no matter the obstacles and setbacks. For William Fox, the movies represented the American promise of greatness for any man willing to work hard enough and long enough for himself and his family. Early on, Fox developed a reputation as a ruthless competitor. Krefft suggests he was no more relentless than other movie moguls of his generation—but something, to be sure, was different about him. Something accounts for the astounding fact that no biography of him, other than an as-told-to book by Upton Sinclair, was ever published. Something has to account for Fox's crucial role, now largely forgotten, in creating the movie industry.

COURTESY OF VANDA KREFFT

**M**aking flicks—as they would come to be called because of the flickering projection lights—at the turn of the 20th century took capital, the cooperation of friends and family, and a willingness to take risks way beyond what was required in the garment industry, where on New York City's Lower East Side many of Fox's contemporaries began their business careers. It was a good place to break into the movie racket—considered low-grade entertainment—for a glove salesman like Samuel Goldfish (who changed his name to Goldwyn), as



William Fox (1879-1952)

long as you could get investors to buy the nickelodeons, essentially five-cent peep shows, the affordable entertainment for immigrants and the lower classes. But Fox, beginning in 1904, used only his own savings, his sweatshop earnings, amounting to less than \$2,000, to get into the movie business. He kept expanding without, for the most part, relying on bank loans. As he later famously said, bankers lend you an umbrella when the sun is shining and then ask for it back when it begins to rain.

Where, then, did Fox's money come from? Profits from his business did not generate enough to underwrite his acquisition and building of more and more theaters and production facilities. Other than loan sharks, which Fox apparently shunned, only Tammany Hall politicians had the resources to back him. Mayors, judges, and other local officials had access to funds that

helped Fox remain in business without partners. Even better, they stood behind him as he took on Thomas Edison, who sought to monopolize the movie business, claiming that his invention of the movie camera and projector entitled him to control the making and distribution of motion pictures. Going up against Edison meant risking fights in the street with his thugs and legal battles with his lawyers. A fearless Fox took on Edison and won.

Krefft, a diligent reporter, follows Fox's murky maneuvers, patiently sifting and evaluating evidence. Some readers may balk at the plethora of detail in her magnificently researched book, wishing instead for a 300-page biography that briskly tells them what they want to know. But in this case, what is at stake is our understanding of the intricacy of the business deals that made the man. If Fox had been interested only in making money, Krefft's book would indeed be tedious—but as she shows again and again, Fox loved the movie business. He wanted his customers to have a good time, and sometimes to feel uplifted and inspired.

Part of Fox's obscurity—who knows anything about him compared to Goldwyn, Louis B. Mayer, and Harry Cohn, for example?—has to do with his unwillingness to promote his own persona, and part is due to his desire to go it alone in a maniacal quest to monopolize the movie industry. Until the 1929 crash, he succeeded. As much as anyone he had created movie stars, especially his "vamp" Theda Bara, the made-up name of Theodosia Burr Goodman, a Cincinnati girl given a fake biography as an exotic European actress appearing in silents such as *Siren of Hell*, *The Devil's Daughter*, and *Sin* (all released in 1915) but also in films of literary classics such as Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* (also 1915). That list illustrates Fox's high and low ambitions. Although Krefft dredges up accounts of these films, many of them have been lost, and with them much of the legacy of Fox's early innovative efforts to transform the movies into not just a national entertainment but an indispensable contribution to American culture and identity.

**A**lthough the Warner brothers are credited with leading the transition from the silents to the talkies beginning in 1927 (hear Jolson in *The Jazz Singer!*), Krefft makes a powerful argument for Fox's primacy in financing the creation of sound film. Whereas the Warners relied on the cumbersome syncing of recorded disks to film, Fox patiently invested in integrating the soundtrack with the film threaded through a projector. This tricky technical problem took a few years to work out, but Fox persisted and his system prevailed. As a reward, he expected the companies that developed his patented inventions to work exclusively with him, but he never obtained their agreement in writing, relying instead on verbal assurances. It was an odd, baffling mistake for such a shrewd man to make, and Krefft never quite explains his apparently naïve faith in his business associates—except to present Fox's blunder as a matter of character. He liked to believe that for all his going it alone, he had the good faith and good will of those he treated fairly in business. Because what he did was not just good for William Fox but also good for the industry, he did not expect to be met with duplicity and opposition.

Fox's failure to realize, beginning in 1929, even before the crash, that his effort to monopolize the movie industry for its own good was doomed is attributable to his isolation. He stayed in New York even when movie production began to shift significantly to the West Coast. He continued to rely on family members and the Fox Film executives he encouraged but also badgered about budgets. His business was growing at such a rate that it attracted the machinations of various Wall Street investors not especially interested in the movies but eager to control the wealth Fox had accumulated. But Fox always thought he could overcome opposition by building bigger production facilities and acquiring a larger distribution network. In the heady days leading up to the crash, he had gone all out to acquire the Loew's theater chain, arousing the anxieties of rivals like Adolph Zukor at Paramount, one of the industry's pioneers, determined to do his part in bringing down the Fox empire.

While Fox had his rivals, Krefft realizes that her subject became paranoid. He saw conspiracies against him everywhere, especially among nefarious bankers and studio heads in cahoots with them. For Fox, the struggle to control his business was as melodramatic as any movie made on the Fox lot. He lost control of the Fox theaters and his production company, a victim of overextending himself, buying too many shares of Loew's stock on margin and paying as little as 10 percent of the stock's value. When brokers



*Most Fox films were lost in a 1937 fire, including Romeo and Juliet (1916, starring Harry Hilliard and Theda Bara) and Stolen Honor (1918, starring Virginia Pearson).*



demanded payment for the full value of the stock, Fox incurred huge debts. Even then, the resourceful Fox almost fought his way out of trouble, finding short-term backers in businesses that he had patronized, but he never recouped enough to vanquish the combined forces of bankers and some of his own executives who could no longer abide his dictatorial methods and were eager to cash in on the lucrative capital and operating funds of the Fox theater chain and production units. So they outvoted him and took control of his

businesses. Plenty of villains appear in Krefft's account, but she never indulges in Fox's own habit of blaming his failure only on his betrayers, although he proved right that the hostile takeover would simply raid Fox of its funds and virtually destroy the company that had been his life's work.

Fox lived another two decades after losing his movie empire. He schemed to get it all back, and he had resources, keeping intact his personal wealth of several million dollars. But he could never content himself with an advisory role. In 1935, the merger of the ailing Fox Film with Twentieth Century, a small company, was conducted without William Fox's involvement, and no one in the new combined studio wanted anything to do with the man who had made the movies. The new production team, headed by Darryl Zanuck, restored the studio to its glory days. Meanwhile, Fox retaliated against the industry by engaging in patent-infringement lawsuits aimed at accruing power that would force movie corporations to license his inventions, effectively exercising veto power over film production. He paid off corrupt judges to enforce judgments in his favor. But in the end these crooked deals were exposed, and Fox spent five and a half months in prison, convicted of perjury.

**A**mid the welter of financial transactions and movie productions, Krefft never loses sight of the man. For much of his life Fox remained a devout Orthodox Jew who believed that God was on his side. He never lost his faith, but he abandoned the idea that his own mission had been somehow blessed. More and more he came to rely on his wife, even during his most fateful business decisions; sometimes listening to her led to disaster. He looked after his family but did not know how to express affection, except for lavishing \$100 bills on relatives who came to visit him. These kinds of details make a biography and Krefft has an abundant supply of them.

The biographer also proves her case. If there is one man who made the movies, it is William Fox. He knew, for example, that the sound system pushed

by Warner Bros. could not prevail in the marketplace. He was confident that movie theater owners would invest in his product, which made the golden age of Hollywood sound film possible. He knew that those movie palaces like the Fox in Detroit required his personal attention. Fox was not emotionally close with family other than his wife and daughters, and he had

unhappy and often distant relationships with others in his industry, but he could empathize with his customers, and he sought to create that thrill and appetite for grandeur that could be purchased in the splendor of a Fox Theatre seat. He brought the world to moviegoers, housing the dreams and aspirations that are, in the end, more than money can buy. ♦

for a terrifying moment like a ragdoll. His forehead was gashed, his nose was crunched, his lip was busted open, his lungs were bruised. Blood spattered the snow. White needed 62 stitches.

Such a blow could have wrecked White's confidence. But after a few weeks of recuperation he was training again. And in January, he qualified to compete at this year's Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

After a strong start at the Olympics, White fell behind by a few points. In the second round, he stumbled. Then came the third, his last run with one man to beat, Ayumu Hirano of Japan, who led White with a 95.25, a score just shy of perfect.

I marvel at the way these races work. Players wait at the top before they go, and once they take off, there's no holding back. So White waited, face forward and snowboard not yet clamped, for more than a minute and 30 seconds, which must have felt like an hour with all the pressure. And then—boom—once you start, your run will be over before you know it. White's final run lasted just 33 seconds from start to stop.

White could have repeated his earlier run and hoped for a higher score executing the same pattern. Instead, he went for something he had never accomplished: a combination of a frontside double-cork 1440 and a cab double-cork 1440. That is to say, White twice in a row flew up off the halfpipe and spun in the air four times while also twice tilting upside-down. To do a single double-cork 1440 is an incredible feat; White had never before done two, even in practice. (In fact, it was while practicing a 1440 in New Zealand that White had smashed his face.) After he nailed the 1440 combination and some other slick moves, White began to celebrate. When his final score—97.75—was announced, he cried. "There were a lot of obstacles to overcome and now it's all worth it," he said.

White is by no means perfect. He recently settled a sexual harassment lawsuit filed by a woman, Lena Zawaideh, who played drums in his band. After his victory in South



# Olympic Surprises

*Shaun White's comeback, Mikaela Shiffrin's nerves, and more from the Winter Games.* BY TOM PERROTTA

To someone watching snowboarding for the first time, it might look like a mix of skiing, surfing, and skateboarding. Some competitive snowboarding events are races and feature obstacles or emphasize speed; others award higher scores for better tricks. They are fairly recent additions to the Winter Olympics, some appearing for the first time at this year's games. For the halfpipe snowboarding variation, which debuted at the Olympics in 1998, athletes start at the top of a snow-covered halfpipe, 22 feet above the bottom. Then off they go, for very little time. It's not a race, but a show: Competitors jump, spin, float in the air, land, and do it again and again until they reach the end of the pipe. It's easy to describe and exciting to watch, but so hard to do that any of the competitors can miscalculate at any moment.

Shaun White is a longtime hero of the sport, good enough and hip enough to have achieved celebrity status. He began competing in the X Games in 2000 at the age of 13 and won his first X Games medal, a silver, in 2002. Year after year, he kept com-

peting and consistently medaling at the X Games. He won or medaled at a long string of national and international competitions. At his first two Olympics, in Turin in 2006 and Vancouver in 2010, he took the gold.

By 2014, White appeared to have passed his snowboarding peak. He and some childhood friends formed a band in 2012—Bad Things, in which White was lead guitarist—and so he apparently didn't keep up with his snowboard practicing. At the 2014 Olympics in Sochi he finished fourth. He appeared at fewer U.S. and international competitions and even sat out the X Games after what he called a "lover's quarrel" with the organizers. Before he turned 30 in 2016, he had launched an annual sports and music festival in California and a menswear line. No one would have been surprised if he had decided to leave competitive snowboarding and not come back.

Yet back he came. By early 2017, he returned to the X Games—but came in 11th out of 12 competitors, his worst halfpipe performance since his first. Still, he was already talking about preparing for the 2018 Olympics. By last October, White was training his hardest in New Zealand. But he crashed, face first, atop the halfpipe. In video of the accident, White's body flops

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Korea, he spoke insensitively about the suit—he called it “gossip”—and simply tried to make the topic go away. He later apologized for that and described himself as a “changed person.” That’s true on the snow; for the rest, time will tell.

Some people think inexperience in sports is costly. I’m not convinced. In some cases, inexperience—and the passion it creates—can be ideal. Just look at the phenomenal beginning by sudden-star Chloe Kim, born in California to Korean immigrants. She’s 17 years old, with a broad smile and a snowboard she has mastered since she first hit the slopes at 4. She can speak French, Korean, and English and always seems confident. In the women’s division of the halfpipe competition, she’s already better than everyone.

Unlike White, Kim had no worries or doubts about her finish. She was so good on her first attempt that she ended up with a 93.75, higher than everyone else. Relaxed and happy, she went for more, like any champion would, and she succeeded in remarkable fashion. As the crowd watched and cheered, Kim leaped back-to-back 1080s (three revolutions in the air). She landed with ease and immediately hugged Arielle Gold, the American who came in third, and Liu Jiayu, the Chinese woman who won silver. Then came the score: 98.25. She was all but perfect.

Now’s the time, at age 17, to talk about random things in life—which, in Kim’s case, means talking about her favorite food (churro ice cream sandwiches). Few viewers of the Olympics know anything about her and her parents, who stood together and watched their daughter from afar. Kim looks as casual and confident as possible—something not uncommon in sports, especially when the person is young and has nothing to lose. That will change for her, probably the next time around. Those Olympics will be tougher, as the



*Top: Shaun White, with scars from his October training accident plainly visible on his nose and lip, celebrates his men's snowboard halfpipe win.*

*Above: Chloe Kim, age 17, during the women's snowboard halfpipe competition that she won.*

*Below: Mikaela Shiffrin on a practice run.*  
*Bottom: Czech skier Ester Ledecka stands in stunned disbelief after she won the super-G race.*



athletes behind her will work even harder to catch up. She’ll feel pressure and maybe even some fear. But all that is still years off; for now, there’s no young American Olympic athlete with more grace and energy.

“The one thing I learned is to give everything a shot,” Kim said. “No regrets is the best way to go.”

No regrets: Mikaela Shiffrin, the best women’s skier in the world, knows this. She also knows how hard it is to keep that attitude. Before the Olympics began, Shiffrin was seen as a woman who could win four gold medals in skiing events, a remarkable feat that would break the record of three. At age 22, she looked in the prime of her career and won her first event with a stellar second run. But one fine race was no guarantee about the rest. The next day was supposed to be easy, in her best event, the slalom, where competitors quickly go back and forth as they race to the bottom. But everything went wrong.

This is where we all have to remember the reality about skiing. It’s an intense sport, one in which a single mistake can, at best, slow you down or, at worst, send you crashing off the course. It’s not like a marathon or a track race, in which falling, crashing, and false starts are rare. Shiffrin has made the conventional wisdom about skiing look false over the years by dominating everywhere she competed. She even won an Olympic gold medal in the slalom at Sochi when she was just 18, and she was the favorite to win again in Pyeongchang. How much the favorite? Betting establishments were giving her an 80 percent chance of winning, an absurdly high number for such a wild and unpredictable sport.

So what happened? First, she threw up, because of nerves, not a stomach bug. She had done that before, but this time didn’t recover. She skied conservatively, as if something less than her best could

be enough. That could have been true; defensive technique can sometimes work for someone so talented. This was not one of those times.

“Coming here and skiing the way I did, really conservative, was a huge disappointment,” Shiffrin said. “Sometimes I feel the only one who can beat myself in slalom is me. I beat myself in the wrong way today. It’s a really big bummer.”

When Shiffrin was younger, little was asked of her, like Kim today. This time, there were outrageous expectations—thanks in part to commercials featuring her and footage of her childhood broadcast on television showing her already looking like a star in waiting. As much as Shiffrin has trained to lose her fear, she had never been in an event like this year’s Olympics, with so much more on the line than four years ago. Shiffrin would have more chances for gold in tougher events for her and success there—after this piece was written—may have salvaged the games for her. No matter what, though, she won’t forget about this one race and the fact that she has to wait another four years to accomplish what she—and everyone else—had planned for so long.

One of the competitions Shiffrin had to sit out because of the packed Olympics schedule was the super giant slalom race—the “super-G.” That race was won this year by Ester Ledecka of the Czech Republic. Ledecka is best known as a snowboarder, and although she was going to make history as the first Olympian to compete in both snowboarding and skiing, no one expected her super-G performance to be especially noteworthy. For her to receive a medal at all is an upset; for her to take the gold came as a shock, even to her. The picture of her standing in her skis in disbelieving silence, mouth open, expecting a correction to the scoreboard that showed her a winner, will likely be one of the enduring images of this year’s Olympics—and is a helpful reminder that no matter our experience and expectations, there is always room for surprises in sports. ♦



# Turmoil and Travel

*Chateaubriand’s memoirs wittily recall the figures and crises of his day.* BY DANNY HEITMAN

In 1885, nearly broke from bad investments and dying of cancer, Ulysses S. Grant spent his final days writing the bestselling memoir that gave his family financial security after he was gone. The story of Grant’s swan song seems memorably American, touched by the mythic national themes of boom and bust, ruin and redemption, the abiding art of the deal.

But a generation before Grant’s grand authorial gesture, French aristocrat François-René de Chateaubriand did something similar with *Memoirs from Beyond the Grave*, published shortly after his death in 1848. By 1836, Chateaubriand was deep in debt when he executed what was essentially a literary mortgage, selling the posthumous publication rights for his memoirs to a group of investors in exchange for a handsome advance and generous annuity for him and, should she survive him, his wife. He had wanted to delay publication of the book until 50 years after his death, but the terms ultimately embargoed the project only as long as he was alive.

Chateaubriand, who had been working on his memoirs intermittently since around 1803, had quite a life story to tell, which is apparently why his publisher was willing to fund the writer’s retirement to get the manuscript. Soldier, witness to the French Revolution, diplomat, North American explorer, novelist, Christian apologist, and poet, Chateaubriand was the Zelig of his day, appearing to be everywhere at once. “Thus did Chateaubriand straddle not only two centuries but also two worlds, that of the ancien régime and that of the modern era,” writes scholar Anka Muhlstein.

*Danny Heitman, a columnist for the Baton Rouge Advocate, is the author of A Summer of Birds: John James Audubon at Oakley House.*

## **Memoirs from Beyond the Grave**

1768-1800

by François-René de Chateaubriand  
translated by Alex Andriesse  
New York Review, 550 pp., \$19.95

Alex Andriesse’s new rendering of the early chapters of the memoirs into English is the first major take on the material in decades. It nicely complements Robert Baldick’s 1961 translation, which has been the go-to version of Chateaubriand until now. Baldick’s selected *Memoirs*, still in print in a Penguin edition, picks and chooses some of the best material from Chateaubriand’s entire work, which covers the years from the author’s birth through 1841. Andriesse translates only the first part, which concludes at the dawn of the 19th century, but he includes Part One in its entirety. There are four parts in all, the complete work running to more than 2,500 pages in the *Pléiade* edition of 1947, Andriesse’s primary source material.

In her introduction to the new *Memoirs*, Muhlstein offers a capsule summary of Chateaubriand’s life—no small feat given its varied and complicated turns. Born in 1768 in Brittany, Chateaubriand grew up in an old castle, which suited his father, an enthusiast of feudal culture. He enlisted in the Royal Army at 18 and witnessed the revolution of 1789, eventually seeking refuge in America to avoid the postwar bloodbath. Chateaubriand’s ostensible reason for visiting America was to discover the Northwest Passage, an audacious idea given his complete lack of experience. His primary claim to fame at that point had been getting a poem published.

Chateaubriand did not, alas, make a navigational breakthrough in the New World, although the change of



Girodet, Portrait of Chateaubriand meditating on the ruins of Rome (ca. 1809)

scenery gave him lots of literary material. *Atala* and *René*, two novellas inspired by his observations of Native American culture, became period hits, along with *The Genius of Christianity*, a defense of the faith against the attacks of the French Enlightenment. By 1800, Chateaubriand was back in France, his fortunes rising or falling with the fickle political climate. He was loyal to the Bourbon throne but a political liberal on many levels, sometimes ostracized for his fervent defense of a free press. “He had a vision of social transformation that did not entail the obliteration of the past, and was proud to declare himself ‘Bourboniste by honor, royalist by reason and republican by inclination,’” Muhlstein notes.

“I wrote in verse for a long time before I wrote in prose,” Chateaubriand

mentions in a chapter on his early creative life. That poetic sensibility is evident in his memoirs, which have a lyrical air much in keeping with his reputation as a founding father of French Romanticism. While Baldick seemed especially keen to the rhythms of Chateaubriand’s frequently orotund style, Andriesse’s translation is, on the whole, a bit more direct and intimate.

Andriesse’s editorial strategy—providing a big chunk of Chateaubriand unabridged rather than producing representative selections from the whole—is probably one the author would have liked. Chateaubriand was fussy about the arrangement of his work, and the memoirs have a sense of design even when they seem random and digressive.

There are times when one wonders if perhaps a little snipping might have

been in order. Chateaubriand’s opening disquisition on his lineage initially looks like something to skip over, recalling those tedious genealogical stretches of the Old Testament in which one generation begets another.

But then Chateaubriand subtly reveals the point of his prolixity. As his brother is citing this noble pedigree so Chateaubriand can be admitted into the coveted Order of Malta, he’s approved for membership just as the revolution of 1789 intensifies, with disastrous consequences for the family. Chateaubriand’s pacing is artfully eerie—the long recitation of ancestral bonds suggesting an inevitable extension of power and privilege far into the future, then that seeming certainty suddenly shattered by violence and atrocity. It’s chilling, in much the same way that Vladimir Nabokov’s *Speak, Memory* demonstrated the fragility of what was assumed to be the natural order in pre-1917 Russia.

Humanity’s vulnerability to change is an underlying theme of Chateaubriand. “The hours never suspend their flight; it is not man who stops time,” he muses, “but time that stops man.”

Like many French writers—Montaigne, Pascal, La Rochefoucauld—Chateaubriand could be brightly epigrammatic, and there are verbal gems throughout, such as this one: “Aristocracy has three successive ages: the age of superiority, the age of privilege, and the age of vanity. Once through with the first, it degenerates into the second, and dies out in the last.” He offers this bit of advice for tolerating political differences—even the ones that had led his countrymen to kill each other: “One has to take men as they are and not always see them as they are not and as they cannot be anymore.”

Readers should dog-ear choice passages if they want to find them again. This NYRB edition has no index, a curious omission for an important work of scholarship. And it would also have benefited from a small chronology outlining key points in Chateaubriand’s life. He did so many things—and lived so many lives—that one sometimes wishes for a few more editorial signposts to follow the narrative. Andriesse’s footnotes—tucked unhelpfully in the back, like the

fine print at the bottom of a contract—are nonetheless worth consulting, especially when they sort out conflicting evidence on the veracity of some of Chateaubriand's claims. An enduring controversy involves the memoirist's account of meeting George Washington in Philadelphia—an impossibility, say some critics, since the president was sick in bed at the time Chateaubriand supposedly shared dinner with him. Biographer George D. Painter takes a more charitable view, arguing that the two did meet, though on a different date. There are also serious questions about whether Chateaubriand visited as many places in America as he claimed; the limitations of period travel make the speed of his itinerary seem farfetched. Andriesse cites possible cultural distinctions on historical accuracy, observing "that while the French are satisfied by a well-told tale, we Anglophones can't help but fact-check." Maybe he's onto something. Naturalist John James Audubon, a contemporary of Chateaubriand who was raised in France and later became a U.S. citizen, also told a few whoppers in his American travelogue, including a tale about hunting with Daniel Boone, an adventure called into question by substantial evidence to the contrary.

Though Chateaubriand might be factually flexible, his *Memoirs* have a way of gravitating toward larger truths. His concerns about the challenges of national unity in the United States seem prescient in light of the current fashion in identity politics: "What connection is there between a Frenchman from Louisiana, a Spaniard from the Floridas, a German from New York, and an Englishman from New England, Virginia, the Carolinas, or Georgia[?]" ... How many centuries will it take to render these elements homogeneous!"

These *Memoirs*, still speaking to new audiences 170 years after his death, would probably surprise even Chateaubriand with their durability. They're a testament to his belief that in a world in flux, literature is a promising constant. "Achilles exists only through Homer," he once told his readers. "Take away the art of writing from this world, and you will probably take away its glory." ♦

B&A

# Novel Critic

*What the innovative writer J.M. Coetzee sees when he turns his eyes to others' works.* BY MALCOLM FORBES

In 2003, when J.M. Coetzee was announced the recipient of that year's Nobel Prize in Literature, the news wasn't met with outraged cries of "Who?" or "Why?" With nine brilliant novels under his belt, along with a haul of prestigious literary awards—including a hitherto unprecedented two Booker Prizes—the South African-born author had been a laureate-in-waiting.

In its citation, the Swedish Academy made mention of the "great wealth of variety" in Coetzee's works. Though spare, austere, and clinically precise, his novels are rich in moral complexity and ambiguity, and each ruthlessly probes the human condition. But each does so in a different way. Over the course of his career Coetzee has channeled literary antecedents (Defoe in *Foe* and Dostoyevsky in *The Master of Petersburg*); has tracked the plight of individuals bowed by societal pressure and prejudice or broken by political upheaval (*Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Life & Times of Michael K*, *Disgrace*); and in more recent books has employed allegory to explore exile and displacement (*The Childhood of Jesus*, *The Schooldays of Jesus*).

Along the way, Coetzee has pushed the boundaries of the novelistic form. *Elizabeth Costello* unfolds as a series of "lessons" ("The Novel in Africa," "The Lives of Animals") while *Diary of a Bad Year* comprises essays and philosophical meditations ("On the afterlife," "On the origins of the state"). There have been three fictionalized memoirs (the last installment, *Sumertime*, being about the late writer John Coetzee, a fictionalized version of him

**Late Essays**  
2006-2017  
by J.M. Coetzee  
Viking, 297 pp., \$28



J.M. Coetzee

self) and the metafictional trappings of his novel *Slow Man* (in which a novelist who had appeared as a character in a previous Coetzee novel shows up and interacts, perhaps authorially, with the other characters). On each occasion Coetzee has not so much tweaked the rules of writing fiction as ripped up the rulebook to pursue his own agenda. The results can be challenging, even maddening, but are always stimulating, underscored with fierce intelligence and ambition.

The Nobel committee also highlighted the "analytical brilliance" that is at work in Coetzee's novels. However, it is on better display in Coetzee's nonfiction, specifically his literary criticism. Two collections—*Stranger Shores* and *Inner Workings*—gathered together book reviews and essays on authors from 1986 to 2005, showcasing the breadth of his reading, the depth of his thought, and the range of his critical faculties. Now comes a third volume, *Late Essays*, which collects 23 literary appraisals published since 2006. Some pieces are short, some are long. A few focus on living greats but most cover famous deads. Some subjects are poets,

Malcolm Forbes is a writer and critic in Edinburgh.

some are novelists; many are European, others are from further afield.

*Late Essays* opens with Defoe—not with his first novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, but his last and much less well known, *Roxana*. Coetzee calls Defoe “an unwitting, accidental pioneer of the novel of realism” and then goes on to examine the book’s preoccupations with both sexual seduction and money (the latter of which can be seen like a watermark throughout Defoe’s oeuvre). As ever—and unlike some critics—Coetzee is undaunted by classic texts: He refuses to overlook flaws or paper over cracks with either mealy mouthed platitudes or disingenuous faint praise. He flags faults—*Roxana* suffers from being too long and repetitive—but also judiciously balances the rough with the smooth by declaring that in the last stretch the pace is cranked up, the drama is restored, and Defoe was “writing beyond his powers.”

Ford Madox Ford is evaluated in a similar fashion. Coetzee, having written his university thesis on this English “craftsman,” is well equipped to judge, and he tackles Ford with authority. He writes off much of Ford’s output, noting how in one novel after another “the construction is careless, the plot uninteresting, the characterization shallow, and the prose merely passable”—before he turns his attention to the book that redeemed Ford, that “virtuoso exercise in novelistic technique,” *The Good Soldier*.

Coetzee studies Ford’s treatment of infidelity and suicide, then he brings in *Madame Bovary* to record “echoes.” Later, in an actual piece on Flaubert’s novel, Coetzee makes another welcome detour to trace parallels, this time finding it “instructive to compare Emma with the other great adulteress of nineteenth-century fiction, Anna Karenina.” And in one standout essay, “Eight Ways of Looking at Samuel Beckett,” Coetzee co-opts Melville to argue that the question that lies at the heart of *Moby-Dick* is analogous to the question at the center of Beckett’s work—namely whether our lives are shaped and guided by a good or bad force or whether what we go through is “just stuff happening.”

Some essays with commonalities are

clumped together. That Beckett essay is one in a batch of four. There are also four essays on writers from Coetzee’s adopted homeland: one apiece on Les Murray and Gerald Murnane and two on Patrick White—hailed in the United States as an “antipodean William Faulkner” and regarded by Coetzee himself as “the greatest writer Australia has produced.” There is a further quartet of essays on German-speaking authors, including Goethe and the enigmatic Swiss writer Robert Walser.

**M**ost of the essays illustrate Coetzee’s expertise. However, some illuminate certain flaws. Ten of the essays in the collection were written as introductions to classic novels translated into Spanish and published by a Spanish-language press. These are brief prefaces within tight confines, which afford Coetzee little room for maneuver; all too often he gives only bare-bones synopses, back-to-basics breakdowns, and opinions posited rather than reinforced.

Again and again in these essay-introductions we witness Coetzee both selling himself short and spreading himself thin. Samuel Beckett, we are told, “was an Irishman who during his early career wrote in his native English but for his later and more important work switched to French.” *The Scarlet Letter*, we learn, “is not an allegory—that is to say, it is not a story whose elements map closely onto the elements of another story taking place in some other, parallel realm.” A novella, we discover, is “a work of medium length with a single action and a single main character, focused on a single topic.”

The flip-side of this oversimplification is Coetzee’s tendency to supply random German words in parenthesis. It is not enough for him to say that Kleist describes the eponymous hero of his story “Michael Kohlhaas” as “terrible,” he also has to include the original “entsetzlich.” In the same piece, we hear how Kleist drew up a “life-plan” (“Lebensplan”) to cover his own “education” (“Bildung”). And so it goes on, here and elsewhere. Instead of clarifying, Coetzee ends up complicating, overburdening his reader with extraneous information. Almost as

frustrating is that some important German terms are either left untranslated (the late-18th-century artistic movement of *Sturm und Drang*) or rendered incorrectly (Walser’s novel *Geschwister Tanner* comes with no definite article; if it had it would be *die*, not *der*).

These weaknesses, which presumably arise from the varying needs and limitations of the different audiences for which the essays were written, fortunately are overshadowed by the collection’s strengths. The nine essays that appeared in the *New York Review of Books* are meatier pieces; the higher word-counts mean more workspace, allowing Coetzee to read widely as well as closely and to develop significant arguments and tackle attendant issues. The longer of the two essays on Patrick White discusses the ethics of countermanding an author’s instructions and posthumously publishing an incomplete or “unachieved” work. A substantial review of Philip Roth’s *Nemesis* incorporates the Oedipus fable, a primer on polio, and fascinating etymological findings: “*Nemesis* (the noun) exactly translates the Latin word *indignatio*, from which we get the English word *indignation*; and *Indignation* happens to be the title of a book Roth published in 2008.” One particularly satisfying essay on Irène Némirovsky leaves us wanting more of the same—more pieces that comprehensively trawl a writer’s life, devoting equal attention to career-defining books and secondary works, and more pieces on women writers (Némirovsky is the sole female author here).

In his book of correspondence to his friend Paul Auster, *Here and Now*, there is one letter in which Coetzee warns of the lopsided power and unfair advantage that a critic can wield over an author: “He becomes like the child lobbing pebbles at the gorilla in the zoo, knowing he is protected by the bars.” Coetzee, who has stood on both sides of the bars, is no such critic. He doesn’t lob pebbles, throw brickbats, or deliver low blows. His critiques are constructive and instructive. Above all they do what all good literary essays should do: They encourage us to read and reread, to appreciate anew and newly discover. ♦

# Marvel Does Bond

*With Black Panther, an old Hollywood formula gets a dash of superhero.* BY JOHN PODHORETZ

**B**lack Panther is the least superhero-y of the Marvel superhero movies. T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman), its protagonist, gets some unearthly abilities from drinking the juice of a plant, but I can't tell you what they are really, and the movie is delightfully uninterested in exploring them. What's more important is that T'Challa presides over an African country called Wakanda that secretly possesses the most advanced technology in the world. A meteorite made of an alien element called vibranium landed there in prehistoric times and the Wakandans figured out how to use it in wondrous ways. To keep themselves safe from slavers and colonial powers, they have made it seem as though Wakanda is one of the poorest countries in the world rather than the richest.

Wakanda is the true superhero of *Black Panther*, not T'Challa—and the movie is really about whether its cultural isolationism can survive in the 21st century and whether it ought to. This was an inspired storytelling decision by cowriter-director Ryan Coogler that makes *Black Panther* an entirely fresh take on the Genre That Has Swallowed the Movies.

Even better, Coogler and his collaborator, Joe Robert Cole, have created the best Marvel villain. He's a mysterious smuggler called Erik Killmonger, played by Michael B. Jordan (the star of Coogler's previous hit, *Creed*). Killmonger turns out to have a hidden con-

nexion to Wakanda. The smuggler's motive in taking on T'Challa is both personal and ideological—and for Killmonger, extremism in pursuit of black power is no vice. I doubt that Coogler



T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman) vs. Killmonger (Michael B. Jordan)

and Cole had George Bernard Shaw in their thoughts as they wrote the screenplay, but they have followed his brilliant example in putting the most powerful arguments in the mouth of their most ethically questionable character.

Kevin Feige, the producer who supervises the Marvel empire, may be the most creative motion-picture executive since Irving Thalberg—whose stewardship of MGM in the 1930s turned that studio into the dominant moviemaking machine of Hollywood's Golden Age before his untimely death at the age of 37. Thalberg helped define the storytelling tropes of the talking picture and the ways in which elements as disparate as photography and costume design and music could be brought together into a seamless glossy object of fantasy wish fulfillment. Feige has overseen the construction of a self-contained "universe" through 18 movies thus far by getting writers and directors to combine Marvel comic-book characters

with stale Hollywood genres and then repurpose both: *Ant-Man* is a comic heist picture straight out of the 1970s. *The Avengers* is a friendship-and-conflict-in-combat war picture, a genre that back to 1926's *What Price Glory*. *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* is a paranoid anti-government thriller. *Spider-Man: Homecoming* is a John Hughes high-school saga.

For its part, *Black Panther* is a James Bond movie. T'Challa's sister Shuri (Letitia Wright) is its Q, the person who invents all the cool gadgets. Lupita Nyong'o is T'Challa's highly competent spy sidekick. They go to South Korea

to take down a South African arms dealer (a hugely entertaining Andy Serkis) who has got his hands on some Wakandan vibranium. They encounter a friendly CIA agent on the model of Bond's Felix Leiter. The good guys and bad guys have a classic Bond confrontation in a casino and then take it to the colorful streets of Busan in a beautifully staged car chase.

But what gives *Black Panther* its surprising resonance is the conflict T'Challa faces after his father's death, when he assumes the crown of Wakanda. What moral compromises have his father and the previous kings made by keeping Wakanda hidden from the world? Could they have prevented the slave trade centuries earlier? Might they have used their technology to empower the poor and oppressed in the world rather than protecting themselves? Boseman, an actor I've previously found kind of dull, embodies T'Challa's dilemma with a quiet grandeur that serves to anchor the movie and make you overlook its essential silliness.

Of course the Marvel movie has its own ironclad genre rules: By the time its third act rolls around, there has to be a 20-minute battle scene of some kind that is so ponderous it makes your eyes roll back into your head. Feige and his people must know from marketing research that the audience wants and needs this, so who am I to object? At least this one features some rhinoceroses.

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, is THE WEEKLY STANDARD's movie critic.

FEBRUARY 27, 2018

\$2.50

# KUSHNER FACES NEW LIMITS INSIDE TRUMP WHITE HOUSE

*Access Restricted to Group Tours*

By JERRY ROSS

WASHINGTON — "I'm sorry, sir, you're not on the list," said a uniformed Secret Service officer, telling Jared Kushner he was no longer able to park on White House grounds. The guard suggested a parking garage four blocks away, adding, "If you hurry, it's only \$15 for the whole day." Kushner arrived 30 minutes later and paid double.

"Kelly!" said Kushner under his breath. He knew just who was responsible for all this.

Back at the White House gate, another officer informed Kushner, until yesterday a senior adviser to the president, that he needed to use a different entrance—the one for White House East Wing tours. The line stretched down the block, and Kushner found himself surrounded by tourists from Minot, North Dakota. "And what do you do?" asked one.

Kushner himself was no longer sure what he did—and he was determined to find out. Unfortunately he was told at the entrance to the East Wing that he did not have the required ticket from his local member of Congress. But as he turned away, Kushner ran into White House chief of staff John F. Kelly.

"Hellooo, Jared," said Kelly, smiling smugly. "Did you not get the email?" Kushner had not—his White House email had been deactivated that morning.

Kushner subsequently learned he was



CHIP SOMODEVILLA / GETTY

Jared Kushner, left, waits to slip into the White House with a catering crew.

no longer welcome at the intelligence briefings—or any briefings, for that matter. He was also denied access to the White House mess. Kelly, however, did recommend a McDonald's on New York

Avenue. "When you do go there, would you mind picking up one of those 'fish delights,' a large fries, and a large Diet

*Continued on Page A12*